



CAREY
NIEUWHOF

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10 Reasons Even Committed Church Attenders Are Attending Church Less Often

By Carey Nieuwhof (<https://careynieuwhof.com/author/carey/>) | 664 (<https://careynieuwhof.com/10-reasons-even-committed-church-attenders-attending-less-often/#comments>)

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(https://i0.wp.com/careynieuwhof.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/shutterstock_180241022.jpg?ssl=1) It comes up in a surprising number of conversations these days. And no one's quite sure how to respond to it.

The issue? Even *committed* church attenders are attending church less often.

Sure, the trend has been happening for years (gone are the days when people attended 50 out of 52 Sundays), but the issue is reaching a tipping point in the church today.

I first wrote about this two years ago in a post called 7 Ways to Respond as People Attend Church Less Often (<https://careynieuwhof.com/2013/04/7-ways-to-respond-as-people-attend-church-less-often/>). In the last 24 months, the conversation has come up far more often and, to many leaders, feels much more urgent.

This isn't a post about why people have *left* the church (that's a different subject.) This is the first in a series of posts about church attenders who love God, appreciate the local church and are even involved in the local church, but who simply attend less often.

This post is the first part of a 5 part series on why people are attending church less often:

Part 2: CNLP Episode 23: Why People Are Attending Church Less Often—An Interview with Will Mancini. (<https://careynieuwhof.com/2015/02/episode23/>)

Part 3: 5 Ways to Embrace Infrequent Church Attenders (<https://careynieuwhof.com/2015/02/5-ways-to-embrace-infrequent-church-attenders/>)

Part 4: 10 Predictions About the Future Church And Shifting Attendance Patterns (<https://careynieuwhof.com/2015/02/10-predictions-about-the-future-church-and-shifting-attendance-patterns/>)

Part 5: CNLP Episode 24: Churchless: Why and How America is Learning to Live Without The Church—An Interview with David Kinnaman (<https://careynieuwhof.com/2015/02/episode24/>)

If you want to access the podcast interviews easily on your phone or other device, the best way is to subscribe to my leadership podcast for free on iTunes (<https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/carey-nieuwhof-leadership/id912753163?mt=2>) or Stitcher (<http://www.stitcher.com/podcast/the-carey-nieuwhof-leadership-podcast>).

So why all this attention?

This trend isn't going away...in fact (as the podcasts will show) it's accelerating,

It impacts almost every church regardless of size, denomination or even location.

It probably marks a seismic shift in how the church will do ministry in the future.

Of course, church *attendance* is never the goal. But attendance a sign of something deeper that every church leader is going to have to wrestle with over the next few years.

The first key to addressing what's happening is to *understand* what's happening.

So...why are even committed attenders attending less often? There are at least 10 reasons.

1. Greater Affluence

Money gives people options.

If your church is at all engaging the middle class, the upper middle class, or a suburban demographic, an interesting trend is developing. The middle class is shrinking, but as this New York Times report shows (http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/01/25/upshot/shrinking-middle-class.html?_r=0&abt=0002&abg=1), it's shrinking (in part) because more of the middle class is becoming *upper* class. Both US

(<http://www.tradingeconomics.com/united-states/disposable-personal-income>) and Canadian (<http://www.tradingeconomics.com/canada/disposable-personal-income>) personal disposable incomes are at all time highs.

There are simply more affluent people than there were decades ago, which may in part explain why so many “average” people indulge their obsessions with granite counter tops, designer homes and decent cars, even without being mega-wealthy.

Naturally, this leaves a huge theological void about ministry to and with the poor, but it helps explain what’s actually happening in the suburbs and increasingly with the re-urbanization of many cities as the affluent move back downtown. Please...I’m not arguing things *should* be this way. I’m simply showing that this seems to be what’s happening.

And again...people with money have options. Technology options. Travel options. Options for their kids. And, arguably, that affluence may be one of the factors moving them further away from a committed engagement to the mission of the local church. It’s perhaps fuelling some of the reasons outlined below.

2. Higher Focus On Kids’ Activities

A growing number of kids are playing sports. And a growing number of kids (<http://www.cnbc.com/id/101929871>) are playing on teams that require travel.

Many of those sports happen on weekends. And affluent parents are choosing sports over church.

It’s as simple as that.

A growing number of kids play sports and a growing number of parents choose sports over church. (<https://twitter.com/share?text=A+growing+number+of+kids+play+sports+and+a+growing+number+of+parents+choose+sports+over+church.&via=cnieuwhof&related=cnieuwhof&url=https://careynieuwhof.com/10-reasons-even-committed-church-attenders-attending-less-often/>)

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3. More Travel

Despite a wobbly economy, travel is on the rise (<http://www.cnbc.com/id/101395861#>.), both for business and pleasure.

More and more families of various ages travel for leisure, even if it's just out of town to go camping or to a friend's place for the weekend or a weekend at the lake.

And when people are out of town, they tend to not be in church.

4. Blended And Single Parent Families

Fortunately, more and more blended families and single parent families are finding a home in church.

So how does this translate into attendance patterns?

Church leaders need to remember that when custody is shared in a family situation, 'perfect' attendance for a kid or teen might be 26 Sundays a year.

Similarly, while the affluent might not be in church because of *access* to reliable transportation, single parents (who, not always, but often, struggle more financially) might not be in church because they *lack access* to reliable transportation.

So here's the strange twist. People who *have* a car are often not in church *because* they have a car. People who *want* to be in church are often *not* in church because they *don't* have a car or because it's not their 'weekend' for church.

Sadly, people who want to get to church simply can't.

By the way, I lead a church (<http://connexuschurch.com>) that virtually requires a vehicle to get there. I love how we often see people with reliable transportation helping out those who don't have a vehicle. That's at least a partial remedy to this problem.

In a shared custody family, perfect attendance for a child or teen might be 26 Sundays a year. (<https://twitter.com/share?text=In+a+shared+custody+family%2C%C2%A0perfect+attendance+for+a+child+or+teen+might+be+26+Sundays+a+year.&via=cnieuwhof&related=cnieuwhof&url=https://careynieuwhof.com/10-reasons-even-committed-church-attenders-attending-less-often/>)

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5. Online Options

Many churches have created a social media presence and many podcast their messages (<https://itunes.apple.com/ca/podcast/connexus-church-video-podcast/id843290736?mt=2>) like we do at Connexus (<https://itunes.apple.com/ca/podcast/connexus-community-church/id271533402?mt=2>). Churches are

also launching online campuses that bring the entire service to you on your phone, tablet or TV.

There are pros and cons to online church (I outline 7 here (<https://careynieuwhof.com/2014/08/is-church-online-a-front-door-or-a-back-door-for-your-church/>)) and there's no doubt that churches with a strong online presence have seen it impact physical attendance.

But whether or not your church has online options doesn't make the issue go away. Anyone who attends your church has free access to any online ministry of any church.

Online church is here to stay, whether you participate or not.

Online church is here to stay whether you participate or not. (<https://twitter.com/share?text=Online+church+is+here+to+stay+whether+you+participate+or+not.&via=cnieuwhof&related=cnieuwhof&url=https://careynieuwhof.com/10-reasons-even-committed-church-attenders-attending-less-often/>)

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6. The Cultural Disappearance Of Guilt

When I grew up, I felt guilty about not being in church on a Sunday.

The number of people who feel guilty about not being in church on Sunday shrinks daily.

I regularly meet people all the time who haven't been in months but LOVE our church.

If you're relying on guilt as a motivator, you need a new strategy. (Well, honestly, you've always needed a new strategy...)

If you're relying on guilt as a motivator to get people to church, you need a new strategy. (<https://twitter.com/share?text=If%C2%A0you%27re+relying+on+guilt+as+a+motivator+to+get+people+to+church%2C+you+need+a+new+strategy.&via=cnieuwhof&related=cnieuwhof&url=https://careynieuwhof.com/10-reasons-even-committed-church-attenders-attending-less-often/>)

text=If%C2%A0you%27re+relying+on+guilt+as+a+motivator+to+get+people+to+church%2C+you+need+a+new+strategy.&via=cnieuwhof&related=cnieuwhof&url=https://careynieuwhof.com/10-reasons-even-committed-church-attenders-attending-less-often/)

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7. Self-Directed Spirituality

People are looking less to churches and leaders to help them grow spiritually, and more to other options.

We live in a era in which no parent makes a visit to a doctor's office without having first googled the symptoms of a child's illness and a recommended course of treatment. Just ask any family physician. It drives them nuts. (Google, doctors will tell you, is not a complete replacement for medical school.)

Similarly, when was the last time you bought a car without completely researching it online?

In an age where we have access to everything, more and more people are self-directing their spirituality...for better or for worse.

Similarly, another characteristics of the post-modern mind is a declining trust of and reliance on institutions.

The church in many people's minds is seen as an institution.

I don't actually believe that's what a church is. I think it's a movement...not an institution. But many churches behave like an institution, and the post-modern mind instinctively moves away from it as a result.

8. Failure To See A Direct Benefit

People always make time for the things they value most. If they're not making time for church, that tells you something.

Even among people who say their love the church and who say they love *your* church, if declining attendance is an issue, chances are it's because they don't see a direct benefit. They don't see the value in being there week after week.

That could be because there isn't much value (gut check). Or it could be because there is value that they simply don't see.

Either way, failure to see a direct benefit always results in declining engagement.

So what are you doing or not doing that leaves people feeling like there's not that much value?

People make time for what they value most. If people don't make time for church...take note. (<https://twitter.com/share?text=People+make+time+for+what+they+value+most.+If+people+don%27t+make%C2%A0time+for+church...take+note.&via=cnieuwhof&related=cnieuwhof&url=https://careynieuwhof.com/10-reasons-even-committed-church-attenders-attending-less-often/>)

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9. Valuing Attendance Over Engagement

I'll talk about this more in the podcast interviews (<https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/carey-nieuwhof-leadership/id912753163?mt=2>) and in the next posts, but when someone merely *attends* church, the likelihood of showing up regularly or even engaging their faith decreases over time.

At our church, I find our most engaged people—people who serve, give, invite and who are in a community group—are our most frequent attenders.

More and more as a leader, I value engagement over attendance.

Ironically, if you value attendance over engagement, you will see declining attendance.

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10. A Massive Culture Shift

All of these trends witness to something deeper. Our culture is shifting. Seismically.

Church leaders who fail to recognize this will not be able to change rapidly enough to respond to the shifts that are happening.

If you want more on how the culture is shifting, I outlined 15 Characteristics of Unchurched People Today (<https://careynieuwhof.com/2013/04/15-characteristics-of-todays-unchurched-person/>) here and outlined 12 Cultural Trends Church Leaders Can't Ignore (But Might) in this post (<https://careynieuwhof.com/2013/06/12-cultural-trends-church-leaders-cant-ignore-but-might/>).

Change is unkind to the unprepared, so prepare.

That's why I'm so passionate about this upcoming series of blog posts and podcasts (<https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/carey-nieuwhof-leadership/id912753163>).

Change is unkind to the unprepared. So prepare. (<https://twitter.com/share?text=Change+is+unkind+to+the+unprepared.+So+prepare.+&via=cnieuwhof&related=cnieuwhof&url=https://careynieuwhof.com/10-reasons-even-committed-church-attenders-attending-less-often/>)

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Will Mancini And David Kinnaman With More

If you want more context for the attendance changes we're experiencing in the church and culture today, listen in on the two podcast episodes below.

You can listen here in the browser window below, or (<https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/cnlp-033-growing-up-gay-parents/id912753163?i=340896917&mt=2>) click here to listen to Episode 23 with Will Mancini to listen on your phone or other device. (<https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/cnlp-023-why-people-are-attending/id912753163?i=335692558&mt=2>)

Click here to listen to Episode 24 with David Kinnaman on your phone or other device (<https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/cnlp-024-churchless-why-how/id912753163?i=336153574&mt=2>).

Want more? Get a fresh leadership podcast episode delivered to your devices every week by subscribing (<https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/carey-nieuwhof-leadership/id912753163?mt=2>) for free.

You can subscribe to my podcast for free here on iTunes (<https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/carey-nieuwhof-leadership/id912753163?mt=2>), Stitcher (<http://www.stitcher.com/podcast/the-carey-nieuwhof-leadership-podcast>) or Tune In Radio (<http://tunein.com/radio/The-Carey-Nieuwhof-Leadership-Podcast-p649370/>).

What Would You Add?

These are 10 reasons I see for even the committed church attender attending less often.

What do you see?


Really looking forward to the dialogue on this subject over the next two weeks.


Before you leave a comment, remember, we're talking about why people *who love the church* aren't attending as much.


This isn't the best place to go on a rant about everything that's wrong with the church. I'll have other posts about that, and remember, I love the church and am committed to us fulfilling our mission better than ever, even if that means radical change...which it likely does.

So what are you seeing in your church? Leave a comment!

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664 Comments

Church Attendance Patterns Are Changing and We Have to Adapt by Karl Vaters - Urban Christian News

(<http://urbanchristiannews.com/2018/05/church-attendance-patterns-are-changing-and-we-have-to-adapt-by-karl-vaters/>) on May 2, 2018 at 7:53 pm

[...] There are many reasons for this phenomenon, of course, as Thom Rainer goes on to explain in this post. Carey Nieuwhof has a different, but also helpful take on why this is happening in a series that starts with this article. [...]

[Reply](#)**Church Attendance Patterns Are Changing and We Have to Adapt by Karl Vaters – BCNN1 WP**

(<https://bcnn1wp.wordpress.com/2018/05/02/church-attendance-patterns-are-changing-and-we-have-to-adapt-by-karl-vaters/>) on May 2, 2018 at 7:52 pm

[...] There are many reasons for this phenomenon, of course, as Thom Rainer goes on to explain in this post. Carey Nieuwhof has a different, but also helpful take on why this is happening in a series that starts with this article. [...]

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New Small Church | Church Attendance Patterns Are Changing And We Have To Adapt
Church Attendance Patterns Are Changing And We Have To Adapt - New Small Church (<http://newsmallchurch.com/church-attendance-patterns-are-changing-and-we-have-to-adapt/>) ON May 2, 2018 at 11:34 am

[...] There are many reasons for this phenomenon, of course, as Thom Rainer goes on to explain in this post. Carey Nieuwhof has a different, but also helpful take on why this is happening in a series that starts with this article. [...]

[Reply](#)

10 Things That Demonstrate The World You Grew Up In No Longer Exists - Change (<http://www.gbjournal.org/10-things-that-demonstrate-the-world-you-grew-up-in-no-longer-exists-change/>) on May 1, 2018 at 3:16 pm

[...] Culture has changed so radically in the last decade or two that even committed Christians aren't in church as regularly as they used to be. (Here are 10 reasons why. careynieuwhof.com/10-reasons-even-committed-churchattenders-attending-less-often) [...]

Reply

Brent Dumler (<https://leadright.me/>) on April 14, 2018 at 7:26 pm

To add to your #9, I'd suggest that higher value on 'engagement' also leads to higher life transformation. Higher engagement in our churches means people are more regularly interacting with the church. And if we (the Church) are modeling our lives after Christ, then those who are engaged with us at church gatherings should naturally be growing to become more like Jesus and less like themselves.

Reply

Ellen on April 7, 2018 at 9:55 am

People don't want to be put in awkward situations when in a church. A person can feel uncomfortable when someone tells other people what s/he wants or is seeking. So, if a church person invites a friend to come to his church, don't use it as an opportunity to tell other people that this person is seeking to convert, because maybe he isn't. Or maybe he just came to your church to be polite. So, overall churches should never tell another person what they need or what they should want (in a church). Everyone will some day need to answer to God on their judgment day, but it does not mean they need to answer to every random member in a congregation.

I know that from my experience with people in church is that they get into small talk, but never want to take time to have real conversations. Get to know a person first! Without fishing for information, find out five things about a person, and make the effort to remember. I feel that people have a much better association with people when they take the time to know the person and learn about his interests and concerns.

Reply

7 Things Christians Should Give Up To Reach Unchurched People - CareyNieuwhof.com (<https://careynieuwhof.com/8-things-christians-should-give-up-to-reach-unchurched-people/>) on March 24, 2018 at 5:17 am

[...] First, it's killing the church. Attendance continues to stagnate or decline as people drift further and further from Christ (here's a 5 part blog series I did on declining church attendance). [...]

Reply

M. Homes on March 20, 2018 at 9:17 pm

I AM FROM TEXAS, USA, I HAVE BEEN IN A RELATIONSHIP WITH MY MAN FOR 2 YEARS, WE PLANNED TO GET MARRIED BUT EVERYTHING TURNED THE WRONG WAY WHEN HE FELL IN LOVE WITH ANOTHER LADY, HE LEFT FOR NO REASON, I DID EVERYTHING TO GET HIM BACK BUT NOTHING WORKED THEN I A FRIEND TOLD ME TO CONTACT DR_MACK@ YAHOO. COM AND I DID WITHOUT DOUBT AND TO MY SURPRISE MY MAN CAME BACK TO ME AND WANT US TO START ALL OVER AGAIN, I AM SO HAPPY MY MAN IS BACK FOREVER..AWESOME!!!!!!!!!!!!!!□□□□□□

Reply

M. Homes on March 20, 2018 at 9:06 pm

I read it on the internet that I could get my ex back BUT I never believed until I contacted Dr. MACK myself. He actually did it for me just as I read about him on the internet. He is worth giving a try. He is well Known all over the world, especially in restoring broken Marriage and relationship. You can contact Dr. MACK directly on dr_mack@ yahoo. com:))))

Reply

Even committed members attend less often!? – Jesus follower (<http://normansennema.com/archives/21342>) on March 20, 2018 at 6:47 am

[...] recently read a post by Carey Nieuwhof on declining church attendance: 10 Reasons Even Committed Church Attenders Are Attending Church Less Often. Although attendance is not the goal or mission of our church, it is an important part of who we [...]

Reply

Marti Hatch on February 16, 2018 at 10:53 am

Thanks! I have been noticed the same trends for several years now.

I have a strange twist on #4 in my current location — many families with young children and both parents work non-traditional jobs (read not 9-5) so the children are not in day care. This changes Sunday worship attendance, leadership involvement, ongoing spiritual formation groups, and Bible study.

I also agree with other commenters about it not always being about affluence. We are in an area with lots of 24/7 shift work and a deep pocket of families with mixed immigration status,

Reply

Jean DeVaty (<http://stjameslg.com>) on February 16, 2018 at 7:58 am

I'm not sure if I feel encouraged to have it so plainly put or discouraged because of the challenges ahead. Thanks be to God that He is in control. Now, to lean into Him and listen for direction ... creative direction and the guts to take the risks.

Reply

Patti on March 27, 2018 at 11:46 am

I agree! The last time I went to a Christian church with my sister, I didn't feel any effect. The church staff also mailed a letter to my home, stating how much I contributed monetarily in 2017. I felt insulted and discouraged. I haven't attended a church since, and don't feel I need to. My relationship with Jesus is very strong and will continue.

Dennison Tate on February 15, 2018 at 4:00 pm

My wife and I have been regular church attenders (to a fault) and engaged (to a fault) for the first 41 of our 43 years of married life and for the years prior to our marriage. It could be said that we are still regular attenders but I would not describe our regularity as “to a fault”; we often take Sunday off to simply stay home or to visit out-of-town family.

I will hasten to say that our church invests heavily in youth and children’s ministries and that they do excellent programs with “tons” of volunteers and a few paid staff. And . . . Sunday morning (9AM and 11AM) services are well-attended. So, why have we, in our 7th decade of church attendance, become less committed to 100% attendance?

Your request for avoiding a rant is difficult to define in terms of where the boundary is between being negative and a rant. I have come to this page twice and walked away because what I was about to write had (and has) a degree of negativity. It’s hard to find a positive reason why I often do not want to go to church. So, at the risk of being un-positive, I will be forthright.

I often ask myself – and sometime others – what it is about the church service that falls solidly under the category of “worship”. That discussion usually comes to no real conclusions. It is easy to identify the parts that are performance – the “cover band”, the “sports report banter”, the video focus on the band members, the darkened house lights and spotlighted band leaders, and the requirement for the audience to stand while the band plays at a dB level, according to my dB meter, of a revving motorcycle.

The preaching content is solid but the last 25 minutes of the 45 minutes is unnerving. I often retreat to the car to wait out the intense sound levels but I can still follow along in the car parked some distance away. I often come home after the service with frayed nerves and the unanswered question about what to do.

Our daughter and husband ask similar questions about why they go to church services even though they are more-than fully-engaged in their church. They have offered a valuable take on how to approach church: don't assume that you are going to corporate worship but, instead, see church attendance as a time and place to get together with fellow believers and possibly to enjoy the performance. It's a gathering to maintain some sense of common purpose and to meet a friend or two. By the way, the "turn around and greet somebody for 20 seconds" is not that valuable to anyone.

I anticipate that we will continue to go to service somewhat regularly – but not because we see it as "worship". I have come to understand that my working alone in the gardens, the solitary hikes in the woods, the times of retreat to the Treehouse are those times when I hear the admonition to "be still and know that I am God". And, my worship is really how I live my days; not my regular attendance where I am merely a spectator.

I don't have answers. What I have come to understand is that the trend to performance-based worship has not yet addressed what has long been a troubling observation – "why don't people like to go to church". I believe that for many decades we have gone to church for other than ideal or preferable reasons. The methods have changed but painting the house a new color has not addressed the problem of the broken windows.

Reply

RB on February 25, 2018 at 11:10 am

Well-said. I think the turn from being the church to going to church is a core issue.

Reply

Lee on March 29, 2018 at 2:38 pm

I can relate to Dennison's comment. Faithful Christians who have been active in church for years – even leaders – are feeling alienated and like they no longer fit in, questioning if God has a place for them to serve in today's Church. Good news is, He does! But it may not be where we think.

Carey is right that the Church has become an institution, at least in our part of the world. This is not the way God intended it. He is in the process of judging all of our institutions – government, media, education, business, and the Church included.

There is another reason people are attending church less often, that Carey left out. I think it may have been in the category of "self directed".

These people are below the radar of church statistics, but are still a vital part of the Lord's Church. They meet in living rooms, restaurants, abandoned offices and store fronts. They do not affiliate with a denomination, but come from a wide array of church backgrounds – or none at all. They do not even apply for a 501c3.

These are deeply committed Christians who have rejected the pull of all worldly enticements and distractions. They are leaving the "instituted" churches by the millions – not all churches, but the majority of denominational churches steeped in tradition and religion – those having a form of godliness but denying His power.

These are people who love God with all their hearts, spend hours alone with Him daily, are doing the work of the ministry in the communities around them, and operate in supernatural signs and wonders like the early Church did. They do “even greater works than I do” just because they believe Jesus said they could.

These are not, by any means, the worldly Christians Carey described above who stopped attending church because of the pressures of modern life. I’m talking about radical, on-fire, out of the box, chasing hard after God Christians – all ages.

Perhaps Christians like these are sensing the Church in general is still in the shallow end. They want to go much deeper. Deep calls to deep.

These people represent a very large remnant – in the millions. They have sensed that God has shifted from the Church age to the Kingdom age in preparation for the last days harvest – and that the comfortable Church, in general, has not transitioned from the traditions of men and religious attitudes of limiting God in their denominational box.

All Christians have been praying for over 2000 years, “Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, ON EARTH, as it is in Heaven...” Why would we be surprised when His Kingdom culture actually starts appearing on earth like it is in Heaven?

These radical Christians simply can no longer put “new wine in old wineskins”. They have had real face-to-face Heavenly encounters with the Lord Himself – like Paul, like John, like Daniel, and so many others we’ve read about. They just can’t go back to the dead churches they knew before!

They have been commissioned for something greater than the ‘church as usual’ crowd can understand or even believe. They need like-minded, called Christians to help carry out their assignments. They know this is no time to sit in the pew or in Sunday School with canned lessons from Lifeway or

Cokesbury. These elementary teachings were of great value during the milk stages of growth in the Church age. But the same lifelong church members have been sucking on this milk, some for 50 years or more, completely unchanged. It's way past time to disciple others to apply these truths to real life and let Him change us into people He can use to further His Kingdom!

This is the age for God's people to get out on the front lines. The Lord is calling His Church to go higher – be the Church He called us to be – without spot or wrinkle – sin or flesh. Does the Church look like that now? To be known by the world for their love for one another. Does the Church look like that now? No! We fight each other!

To take care of the widows, orphans, hungry, sick, hurting, and bring them into the family of God – with signs and wonders following. Does the Church look like that now? Not by just taking up an offering for missionaries overseas – that has always been important and will be in the days to come. But He wants us to do our own mission work right here at home – actually doing it ourselves, getting our hands dirty, right in our own neighborhoods, cities and towns.

To disciple each other in preparation for the last days harvest which is coming quickly.

To understand and get in the flow of His Kingdom culture and to usher it in.

Because we do not do these things, we do not walk in the authority to teach it to others.

We have been sending out missionaries to all the world and neglecting discipling our own brothers in Christ and the lost right here at home. We should not be surprised that they have slipped away as they have!

All these things Christ commanded us to do are not happening at most churches. We talk a good talk, but we don't produce the fruit. And the world knows phony when they see it – especially youth, who are the largest group to leave the Church.

These changes must take place with His people, as Jesus said they would before the last days harvest. And yes, there are already millions that have a passion to track with what He is doing in the earth now – some of them are still in hiding, faithfully hanging on for dear life in stagnant, dead and worldly churches, hoping to find a place where they can somehow fit in to His plan. They are forced to become “self directed” for lack of leadership.

But we do not despair...God has a plan for His Church! He is not finished with us!

Within a few years we will not recognize the Church as we know it today. Church leaders who do not follow God's call to make the necessary changes from institutions of stagnated, lifeless, worldly churches to His Kingdom culture will be replaced with those who will. God Himself will close the doors of dead churches that quench Holy Spirit – many already have closed. He is judging His Church for becoming a worldly institution. He will spew the lukewarm out of His mouth. (Meaning He cannot use them in His plan on the earth. No, they are not considered lost.)

But this is not bad news. It is GOOD news!

Because in these last days He said He will “pour out His Spirit on all flesh”, it will be all hands on deck for the last days harvest. “All that call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved”. The lost will be desperately searching for outposts of God's love and power where they can learn more about Him and give themselves to Him. There's too much at stake. God will not lose this last days battle for souls. We must be ready to give an answer for the Hope that we have.

The drop in church attendance is for a reason. We are in, not just a new season but, a new age! God Himself is calling us up higher, "for such a time as this".

We are living in the most exciting times the earth has ever seen. It's time to grow up in Him, go deeper with Him, and get to work with Him!

Reply

Cliff Leslie on February 15, 2018 at 2:23 pm

""The early church started gathering on Sunday morning in the first century...it was the day of resurrection""
That statement was written earlier, but no evidence of this was given. In Acts of the Apostles we read where the disciples met for worship on the Sabbath, but there is no mention of meeting on Sunday for regular worship. If this was done it would not be hidden, for the Jews would have violently opposed it.
I believe that God's commandments cannot be changed or adjusted. What God commanded stands for ever. I can give many Bible verses to support this.
The devil has always wanted man to disobey God. He was successful with Adam and Eve, and now he wants to deceive the whole world.

AB

Reply

Scooter Ward on February 15, 2018 at 9:37 am

Interesting read, bottom line: "value engagement over attendance."

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near" (Hebrews 10:23-25, NASB).

I'd like to add that obedience to the command is still not optional; however, engagement oftentimes precedes attendance. I heard it said by same author, "Your emotions eventually catch up with your obedience." This could be true of engagement and attendance as well. We need contenders for the faith (participants in worship) not simply attenders (spectators of worship).

Don't assume the trends without making prayer a priority and relying on God to build His church.
#KingdomPriorities

Reply

John W Reed on February 10, 2018 at 10:59 pm

Read through some articles. One thing not mentioned, unless addressed elsewhere, is the idea of churches doing away with multiple services. Most churches used to meet Sunday morning, Sunday night and Wednesday night. Plus a few prayer meetings from time to time. With a shift in work culture, many businesses and emergency services like Fire, Medical, Police, Mental health, Patient care, Corrections, are 24 hour jobs. This requires shift work. Shift workers often work nights and weekends. Imagine working midnight until 8 in the morning. Would you go to church on Sunday at 10 or 10:30? Would you be awake enough to get anything out of it? What about those who get off at 8 AM Sunday but then have to work at midnight? What about if their

days off are in the middle of the week? I work law enforcement and my wife works in the mental health field. Majority of churches here have a Sunday morning service and that's it. Oh they may have groups but these meet usually on Sunday night and only for 6 to 8 weeks at a time. So Shift workers get ignored by most churches in America. I lived in several states and this is the new trend in churches. I wonder what Jesus thinks about ministers abandoning a whole segment of the population for convenience sake? I mean why are many places building 500 seat, 1000 seat buildings and then only using it one day a week for barely 90 minutes? Why are people giving to that? It helps no one but the average family with money. When we bring this issue up with pastors they just shrug it off. Sad. That's a major reason people don't come to church. It is become a business only open one day a week...

Reply

Jeff on February 15, 2018 at 9:19 am

IMO, most of the reasons listed for declining attendance by committed church attenders are mistaken. There are two reasons listed that are significant — online options and self-directed spirituality. The reason for the first being “appealing” is that churches more and more are eliminating opportunities for lay leadership and to contribute talents to worship. More and for churches hire more and more staff and only ask/expect congregants to “show up”, “bring a meal”, etc. It isn't expected NOR DESIRED for congregants to bring leadership or deeper, personal participation. In addition, most activities/programs that developed community within the congregation have been eliminated by the church (examples include elimination of choirs and Sunday morning teachers/classes) as they pursue church growth fads. The result is feeling of isolation and inability to meaningfully worship in action – and if that's the case why not just watch online?

Even more disheartening and tragic is the fact that churches are more and more abandoning the truth of Scripture for political correctness and/or moral therapeutic deism. Committed churchgoers see this and realize they must “self-direct” their spiritual growth to a much greater than ever before because the church (mainland denominations, and, more and more, evangelical churches) is less and less willing to stand for truth and truly disciple in truth. Grace is treated as a get out of jail free card in the form of “we’re all flawed and must love each other” messages which excuse sinful behavior and sidestep Jesus’ words on what it means to follow Him. People actually want and need the truth and the loving encouragement, exhortation, and, yes, even rebuke to be fed and grow spiritually.

Reply

RB on February 25, 2018 at 11:23 am

I think this problem lies at both ends of the spectrum: MTD and PC of the left and neo-pharisaism of the mean-spirited religious right.

Reply

Dave (<https://disqus.com/home/channel/proclaimingtheword/>) on January 11, 2018 at 10:42 am

I think another factor is that people have believed the idea that “I am the church” at an individual level, and so they think staying home, listening to an online sermon (at some point during the day or week) and streaming worship music is true Church worship. It’s not.

[Reply](#)

Marie on January 18, 2018 at 9:23 am

This is a true statement but a true theological premise is we are the Church is scriptural and to ignore it is self defeating, not to argue but we worship the idea of Church more than the idea of Christ and God and when the Apostles walked this earth □ they neither had church names and signs above their doorpost. The Church doors are just a convience that God provides to make our lives easier to gather because Jews still went to the Synagogues and believers gathered were ever they could. We become obsessed at being bigger than others when a building defines us and there are those who love to receive self worship in this setting, it's a public impression they leave us because we come into their space that they control and they rule in all forms of religiosity rather than Christ like and judgment of us comes with their standards and not Scriptural premise they don't want to know criticism or corrections they label that as devisive and neglect you as a result of it. Use us, is an understatement.

[Reply](#)

7 Disruptive Church Trends That Will Rule 2018 - CareyNieuwhof.com (<https://careynieuwhof.com/7-disruptive-church-trends-that-will-rule-2018/>) on January 1, 2018 at 10:49 am

[...] years, we've noticed that even committed Christians are attending church less often (here are 10 reasons why), but this is the year we'll see more and more church leaders re-imagine what it is to be the [...]

[Reply](#)

Why Attending Church No Longer Makes Sense - CareyNieuwhof.com (<https://careynieuwhof.com/why-attending-church-no-longer-makes-sense/>) on December 30, 2017 at 7:36 am

[...] are many reasons why that's happening (I outline 10 here), but I think it's increasingly evident that it no longer makes sense to attend [...]

Reply

Gordo on January 2, 2018 at 10:29 pm

Irrelevant... where else do I have to suffer through hour long monologues (I listen to podcasts or surf the internet...insipid maudlin music (I have actually taken to wearing headphones and listening to Radiohead during "worship") every Sunday becomes a gigantic why? Most importantly church manages to make boring and pedestrian the gospel... how one takes awesomeness of Jesus and reduces it so, is mind boggling.

Reply

jennifer on January 4, 2018 at 5:18 pm

I agree.. I go to church to participate in Worship and not just sit like a bump on a log. We need to get rid of worship teams and choirs.

[Reply](#)

David on February 15, 2018 at 9:50 am

This comment is dead on. While I am a committed and highly involved member of my church, so much of what we do is geared to performance by professionals – choir, worship leader, pastor. Most modern churches are designed to prevent the average person in the pews from being involved in a truly meaningful way – they are just supposed to be passive, obedient servants who follow the dictates of their spiritual betters. This is so wrong, and such a violation of scripture.

[Reply](#)

Matt on January 10, 2018 at 10:13 am

Hey Gordo, why don't you paint us a picture of what might be relevant for someone as clearly disengaged as you are? Seems easy to sit in one's ivory tower listening to Radiohead. I'd love to hear how you're positively contributing to recovering the awesomeness of Jesus in the local church context...

[Reply](#)

Marie on January 18, 2018 at 9:35 am

□ amen you got that right they are so busy at being busy they neglect everyone else and there agendas are supreme, if you're not on board they treat you differently but publicly give the adoration out to others from the pulpit and everyone else either feels like shit or guilty they don't or able to help. Guilt , Shame and disappointment is their main motivational sermons and what mind boggling is that they disguise it through out the sermon in scriptural precepts and everyone sees right through this, Church is no longer spiritually safe.

Reply

Marie on January 18, 2018 at 9:42 am

I belonged to a Baptise Church awhile ago and their main push was this is a working Church you have to work if you want to be a part ' that came from the Pulpit more than once. But I experienced more unkindness from this Church and hard to warm up to group, ever. Not everyone there was bad but there was enough that I just quit ☹ I am disabled.

Reply

Amanda on December 20, 2017 at 5:28 pm

I think one that you are missing is something I might call “germaphobia” . . . I have 5 kids, and recently had to miss 5 out of 6 consecutive weeks of church because we had a round of colds going through the house. Mostly just runny noses, which would’ve been no big deal when I was a kid, but according to our church’s “wellness policy” they were not allowed in the children’s ministries. I would have been happy to take them late and just go to the service, but we only have one car and my husband teaches Sunday School, so I ended up staying home with the sick-kid-of-the-week.

Reply

Liz on December 20, 2017 at 3:08 pm

I know in our case, our son absolutely hates going to our youth group because he is not being included. He’s not being asked to be in a group. He was being excluded because of costs. Our youth group can’t even have a weekend retreat without it costing \$75 or more! We can’t afford the pricier activities. We were paying for his non-church friends to go to activities with him so he would have a friend at the activities. Our two former youth ministers just did not get the other kids to include those on the fringes. Plain and simple. INCLUDE everyone!! Several other friends of ours went through the same thing with their kids. We even talked to the youth ministers. One didn’t do anything for 4-5 months, and when he finally did, he just took our son out for ice cream a few times. That was nice, but it still wasn’t dealing with the issue of the other kids including him! Then, when we talked to the other youth minister, after several months of waiting for the first one to do something, she referred us back to the other youth minister...who was the one who didn’t do anything until 4-5 months later. Very frustrating! Our son was close to being baptized, now he wants nothing to do with church, who excludes him.

Reply

Ladokguy on December 20, 2017 at 8:56 am

Or perhaps it's because some believers are rejecting man's version of "religion" and "church" and are seeking God instead of traditions and myths. It seems like "church" leaders are always trying to find secular scapegoats and blame "Satan" when their pews aren't full and the cash flow is slowing down.

Reply

Marie on January 18, 2018 at 9:52 am

Amen ☐ that is so true and if it's not cash, it's you service they are users, what about what God wants to do with us is not ever apart of their programs. The same old programs unfulfilled endless small groups and programs. They expect people to be in Church when it should be the Church going out to them and most of your Christian people are not to intelligent why would the world would want to come to Church except a very small few, when they hate us as they did Christ. Many Christians, I hate to admit this are lazy! Or afraid because they or we are as sheep ☐ we need a genuine care and it just isn't there.

Reply

How and Why the Future Church Can Thrive (<https://churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/315118-future-church-can-thrive-carey-nieuwhof.html>) on December 18, 2017 at 12:57 am

[...] in many places is shrinking, not growing. Even committed Christians are attending less often (here's why). And young leaders aren't exactly flocking into [...]

[Reply](#)

Acting On Faith » Blog Archive » How And Why The Future Church Can Thrive (<http://www.actingtonfaith.com/how-and-why-the-future-church-can-thrive/>) on December 15, 2017 at 5:13 pm

[...] in many places is shrinking, not growing. Even committed Christians are attending less often (here's why). And young leaders aren't exactly flocking into [...]

[Reply](#)

How and Why the Future Church Can Thrive - CareyNieuwhof.com (<https://careynieuwhof.com/how-and-why-the-future-church-can-thrive/>) on December 11, 2017 at 10:11 am

[...] in many places is shrinking, not growing. Even committed Christians are attending less often (here's why). And young leaders aren't exactly flocking into [...]

[Reply](#)

The Death of News, Re-Tribalization and The Church - CareyNieuwhof.com (<https://careynieuwhof.com/the-death-of-news-re-tribalization-and-the-church/>) on November 30, 2017 at 9:33 am

[...] attendance even among committed Christians has been well documented here and elsewhere (here are 10 reasons even committed church attenders attend less often these [...])

[Reply](#)

7 Things Christians Should Give Up to Reach Unchurched People • ChurchLeaders.com (<https://churchleaders.com/outreach-missions/outreach-missions-articles/299772-christians-give-reach-unchurched-people-carey-nieuwhof.html>) on November 5, 2017 at 8:30 pm

[...] First, it's killing the church. Attendance continues to stagnate or decline as people drift further and further from Christ (here's a five-part blog series I did on declining church attendance). [...]

Reply

Marie on January 18, 2018 at 9:55 am

When people leave Church is not always because they leave Christ, they leave Church to find Christ.

Reply

10 Reasons Even Committed Church Attenders Are Attending Church Less Often – CareyNieuwhof.com | Pastor John Reading List (<https://pastorjohnreadinglist.wordpress.com/2017/11/04/10-reasons-even-committed-church-attenders-are-attending-church-less-often-careynieuwhof-com/>) on November 4, 2017 at 9:23 am

[...] 10 Reasons Even Committed Church Attenders Are Attending Church Less Often – [...]

Reply

Katarina Williams on July 6, 2017 at 11:50 am

Good morning,

My name is Katarina Williams; I am the Administrative Assistant to the Church Development Director for the Southern Missouri District Office of Assemblies of God. Our office found your article "10 Reasons Even Committed Church Attenders Are Attending Church Less Often" to be an effective tool that we would like to share with our ministers. We are currently working on a monthly newsletter and we would like your permission to have the first few sentences of this article with a link to your website included in the newsletter. Our newsletter is a way to encourage our ministers with our own blogs and with articles that we believe could be an effective ministry tool for them.

We thank you for your ministry and we look forward to hearing from you. Thank you.

Reply

Beyond The Pulpit: Choosing The Right Medium For Your Church Announcements - Aware3 (<https://aware3.com/2017/06/beyond-the-pulpit-choosing-right-medium-church-announcements/>) on June 28, 2017 at 9:53 am

[...] stage, you're assuming that everyone is in their seat attending one of your Sunday services. But, the average church attendee only makes it to church twice a month. So on any given Sunday, you are missing one-half to two-thirds of the people who you want to hear [...]

Reply

The Biggest Culture Shift for Youth Ministry? | achurchforstarvingartists
(<https://achurchforstarvingartists.wordpress.com/2017/06/27/the-biggest-culture-shift-for-youth-ministry/>) on June 27, 2017 at 6:02 am

[...] as we live in a time when the average committed church member attends weekly worship less often (read this), youth ministers tell me that their youth do not attend activities every week. A youth group [...]

Reply



Marc S. (<http://www.lamadministries.org>) on June 17, 2017 at 5:17 pm

While those are definitely some of the reasons people stop “attending church”, I believe there is a greater reason for why “committed” attendees have given up. And it isn’t a big secret.

We have lost our authenticity, our message, our purpose, and our depth. Let’s face it...the majority of churches are structured after a business model with one goal: get more people into the sanctuary. Therefore, we try every gimmick in the book including some that are so over the top they are too embarrassing to mention.

Go back to the days of Jesus’ “ministry.” It was very simple, deep, and spiritual. Today’s church is nowhere close to that. So, people are leaving it. I know this not only from personal experience, but from the countless number of people I have spoken with concerning this very issue.

So... 1) Stop treating church like a business. 2) Stop trying to get people into the doors. 3) Deal with the spiritual issues. 4) Keep it simple. 5) Become involved in people’s lives.

Reply

Corinna on October 14, 2017 at 4:38 pm

I agree with Marc. I have witnessed that even in the church we planted a few years ago. We want to be authentic and I can't say we don't care at all, but priorities show their fruit in the actions of the church members (in its entirety).

To go back to the reasons people leave, I suggest testing the core of the matter by asking the affluent, travelers, blended families and others listed under reasons for less church attendance why they really stay away. I don't stay away from my family, no matter how affluent life gets or how much I travel. I carve out time that I keep guarded to ensure my family gets my attention and I get theirs so we can be there for each other, relate, love, share. If church is not the family of (in) Christ, it's just a social club and as such, it gets prioritized around family.

When we make attendance, growth rates and other KPI part of the motivation, we run a business. While measuring is good to assess shifts and look for reasons, it is an entirely different subject to make such items the goal.

IMHO we should have more interest in the question 'how can we convey the gospel to a group of people in a way they understand it?' And 'how can we disciple people effectively to see their lives truly transforming, bearing fruit and living out their purpose?'

Reply

christoph on June 14, 2017 at 6:05 pm

Okay I attended a Bible college in Canada in the 80's. Attend daily chapel time was required. Now that same College want to build mature adults. To attend chapel is not required anymore. I was on campus of that College . During meals I asked students which church they attend. I will not forget that one guy who could not give me an answer, since he attends very irregular any church. The negative influence of that former Bible College shows its fruits

Reply

Living Stones – Thoughts from the Bald Guy (<https://thebaldguyblog.wordpress.com/2017/05/31/living-stones/>) on May 31, 2017 at 11:39 am

[...] This one speaks to people inside the church: <https://careynieuwhof.com/10-reasons-even-committed-church-attenders-attending-less-often/> [...]

Reply

10 Things That Demonstrate The World You Grew Up In No Longer Exists - Carey Nieuwhof (<https://careynieuwhof.com/10-things-that-demonstrate-the-world-you-grew-up-in-no-longer-exists/>) on May 30, 2017 at 6:09 am

[...] Culture has changed so radically in the last decade or two that even committed Christians aren't in church as regularly as they used to be. (Here are 10 reasons why.) [...]

Reply

What You Never Know You Miss by Skipping Sunday Morning – Pastor Ben's blog (<https://youthpastorben.wordpress.com/2017/05/19/what-you-never-know-you-miss-by-skipping-sunday-morning/>) on May 29, 2017 at 1:47 pm

[...] Finally, in this post, I outline 10 reasons why infrequent church attendance is becoming more frequent even among Christians. [...]

Reply

Lynn Williamson on April 14, 2017 at 8:37 am

RE: # 8. If I fail to see a benefit for ME, I am concentrating on ME instead of the Lord of Life. Worship is about God ... right? It's not about me, it's about God.

Reply



Ken on March 22, 2017 at 2:16 am

Could be something as simple as, "There are none who seek God, no not one." Several decades ago we saw a shift from Gospel proclamations to new age, self-help style sermons. There was no Gospel. And since it is the Gospel that is power of God unto salvation, there was a lot of false conversions that took place. So many churches that were made up of uncovered members, saw those unconverted members become unconverted leaders, who replicated the process and made disciples of themselves rather than disciples of Jesus. People began attending services as a social gathering, but since they were not truly converted, their children grew up seeing that their parents valued "Church" as a means of social gathering, but little else... they quickly discovered that they could have their own social gatherings someplace other than the local congregation. The "church" became more and more worldly in an effort to reach "seekers" (even though none seek God), and in

an effort to make the social gathering more relevant to the wayward children. But it hasn't worked. It hasn't worked because either the local congregation is failing at making their Sunday gathering relevant to those worldly "seekers" or, they have done very well and the true, converted Christian quickly sees this, and moves on.

Reply



Mike Ritter (<http://mikeritteronline.com>) on May 7, 2017 at 2:17 pm

This is an extremely judgmental and frankly wrong assumption. It jumps right to the worst case and lumps everyone in the fallen away camp.

You're missing that church has always been a social gathering. ALWAYS! Even churches in the Bible are social gatherings where fellowship is the central exercise of worship. You condemn "seeker"-friendly churches in a pious manner that demonstrates your ignorance or religiosity. Many people hunger and thirst for righteousness but find themselves put off by different churches for various reasons.

So, the cultural changes referenced in this article are much more applicable.

We are seeing a falling away from the centrality of Sunday morning services as a regular practice. Even in my household, we attend once or twice a month, but are in regular fellowship with believers and exercising our spiritual gifts encouraging and blessing other believers and the unbelievers in our community.

It's an emphasis on marketplace Christianity and away from institutional. Do we miss church when not there? Yep. Are we backsliders because we are not weekly attenders? Nope.

[Reply](#)

GMC3MOM (<http://www.genamccown.com>) on March 19, 2017 at 5:11 pm

On the 9th point, I think this is probably the biggest reason we see decline. And, as part of that gut check... be mindful if you see your regular attenders/volunteers leaving. If that is happening something is off. I've attended quite a few workshops and focus groups where people lamented over their attempt to engage and become active in the church but were dismissed. We need to be helping our members identify their spiritual gifts and then figuring out where to plug those gifts into serving the body/church and/or the community.

If your measuring success by the # of new people walking through the front door and not recognizing the ones walking out the back, you have a problem.

[Reply](#)

Ralph Chambers on March 12, 2017 at 11:05 am

Old age and hospice. Nursing homes etc.

[Reply](#)

Bebe on March 6, 2017 at 11:13 pm

Fuck Church and god.

Reply

Mrs Wardle on February 22, 2017 at 2:51 am

I am finding that all church services in my district are getting earlier and earlier, and that in an elderly community! Attract youth is the catch cry, but the youth are still fast asleep after their hectic Saturday night traditional night out! Other time slots come right in the middle of people's meal and meal preparation times. I suspect that some of the reasons are to get the Church over and done with and have the rest of the day off for all sorts of recreational activities. What ever happened to the 11am service which was common in farming communities, and the 7pm Gospel service in pre Television days.?

That is just one reason...each of the commentators has presented valid information.

We talk not stop about Church growth.....not reaching the Lost.

We call them "unchurched" now. rather than sinners needing to be rescued from eternal separation from God. We tolerate sin. We embrace beliefs which are against God's will. We deny the truth of God's Word, we compromise on doctrine. We care little that friends and family are not saved, because we vaguely think they will make it somehow without Christ. They think that all roads lead to Heaven.

People outside of God's family, have no sense of guilt for sin or a need from a Saviour of any kind.

Conviction of souls being sinful, is something considered not necessary today as just something not nice".

Reply



GreeLee on January 26, 2017 at 9:21 am

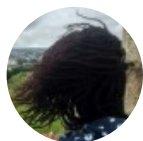
As someone who's almost old enough to remember it, I can tell you that you're missing a huge reason, and that's work. There was a time in our not so distant past that most companies would be completely closed on Sundays. You couldn't even go to a grocery store or gas station because they were all closed. Since then the cost of living has gone up, but wages have stagnated, and it now takes 2 people to finance a family. So now, not only is work available on a Sunday, but in most cases is necessary to keep a family going.

Reply

Walter Swaim on February 25, 2017 at 9:50 am

Very true. I live in Houston and shift work is a curse with the blessing. I've had trustees who are all shift workers and took months to have one meeting together. Most of those working on Sundays have to but others choose to for extra money over Jesus. For a small church like ours working on weekends – and all the other reasons he stated correctly, especially the sports one – is just eroding us and our ability to fulfill the vision and mission. It's eroding me too as a leader.

Reply



Londonshaz on June 8, 2017 at 1:58 pm

Absolutely. Modern life is so busy and hectic these days. I have a pretty ordinary 9-5 job, but I commute into London every day and am absolutely shattered by the weekend. I try to make Sunday service a priority out of the two meetings a week (the other one is a fellowship group Thursday nights) but the service starts at 9.30am and sometimes it's a struggle. One of my friends travels frequently for work in a Christian charity, so she can't get to church all the time or is exhausted. That is life in 2017! We need to stop guilt tripping people about attendance stats and get with the times. E.g. Have one service on a Sunday instead of 3, or if you have more than one, cater to different audiences rather than expecting the same people to be at everything. Have bible study group every other week. I thought Sunday was supposed to be a day of rest...

Reply

Sean on June 30, 2017 at 10:05 pm

Exactly! Ten years ago, my wife and I worked from home, and we home schooled our two sons. Fast forward ten years. I'm working from home again, but on weekends, I work 8 pm to 8 am the following morning. After being up all night, I'm almost in a coma by the time church service starts. My wife has a business that requires her to work until 9 pm every evening, and she leaves town 1 or 2 weekends per month. When she's not out of town, she tries to get some extra sleep on weekend mornings. My oldest son often works Sunday mornings, and my youngest son works 6 days a week starting at 7 am. Sunday is the ONLY day of the week he can get some extra sleep. And forget the idea of "Well, if you can go to work at 7 am every morning, you should be able to do the same for God," argument. He is 17 years old and is totally exhausted by the time the weekend comes. It's not a spiritual issue at all. I had lunch with our pastor and said, "Our lives are completely different now. Sunday morning is basically the worst time for all of us to try to do anything together. What I would give to see our church have Saturday evening service, or Sunday

evening service!" I mean, remember when society would gripe about "banker's hours"? How helpful to a bank's customers if the bank is only open when the customers are at THEIR jobs?! And what about doctors, nurses, and other types of workers that WORK during Sunday mornings. Is it, "Oh well, too bad for them."?! Seriously, I think the church needs to do a little soul searching of its own...

Reply

Deb on October 19, 2017 at 2:43 pm

I agree this is s key point. Also both adults work and usually in jobs that used to be 2-3 separate employees. The schedules now for school, work, and extra curricular activities are no longer aligned either. Schedules change weekly even and these things together make life much more exhausting and stressful and people often say they are simply exhausted and Sunday is it. Also with sports, I participated in far more activities plus church, ss, youth and Chior and service...but the schedules were consistent, all the sports schedules were set at coordinated day/time and travel was not necessary to play for the school teams. Now the schedules are not like this and travel is required if you want to play for school sports. Also, we are required to give extra money, to volunteer and assist in all of these in ways my parents' ge station did not have to. I do see lots of travel for families on weekends beyond just holidays and that is also a HUGE factor in the baby boomer core of our churches. I think we are onto a lot in this article but missing some of the main almost unsolveable portions. Another thing is any play for kids has to be scheduled and kids have no social or play time in school anymore...no more go outside and play with friends in the neighborhood due to: crazy schedules! That is another key. Young faniliesjust literally don't gave the time and energy of tears past and many find a deep need for Sabbath

which was not valued in its true form in previous generations..everything being closed vs. genuine rest and renewal...we always want to put people to work when they come through the doors and they are just exhausted in their spirits.

Reply

Tim R. on January 15, 2017 at 3:14 pm

Related to #5 I think the rise of social media substituting for face to face interaction that you would get at a local church. You don't need to go to church on Sunday to see the Jones' new baby or to hear if Shannon got that new job or to learn other life stories from people who you see at church. If someone attended church for both spiritual feeding and a "light" community, then the internet has replaced that with podcasted sermons and facebook posts.

The big question is how do we respond to this new reality?

Reply

Lisa Romans on December 31, 2016 at 1:58 am

Churches fail to preach the pure Word of God, seeking to tickle the ears of the people. The watered down Word doesn't offend congregations, but it also lacks the power of God. I've heard enough topical messages that grab a scripture here and there, often times out of context.

[Reply](#)

Darryn Francesco on January 11, 2017 at 4:14 am

AMEN sister, tell it like it is

[Reply](#)

Ms Vivian (<https://www.facebook.com/miverticalcristo/>) on May 30, 2017 at 6:07 pm

Right on point, today's sermons are inspirational based on life topics, not on our Savior Jesus!

[Reply](#)

Seek Him while He may be found on December 28, 2016 at 3:42 am

I dont attend church, because the people there still my fire. None of them want to really talk about God or his kingdom. Its just great message and how ya been. Or do you want to do lunch, or can your kids go to the movies with ours tonight, or so and so is having a football party, or the church picnic is next week. Or wanna go golfing... and at any of these that you attend its sad how far God is from there hearts. The mere mention of his word in the literal meaning could quickly make you a party pooper or outsider. Church has become like the world, you know the same world we are told to come out of. The same world that is at war with God. Its quite sad.

[Reply](#)

GreeLee on January 26, 2017 at 9:22 am

The answer to darkness in a Church is not to take the only light out of it.

[Reply](#)

Mike Slaney on January 26, 2017 at 5:24 pm

Tired to reply to you and up voted myself, it's a day! I think I know what you mean, what keeps me going in not "KEEPING" my thoughts or attention on people, hard to do. I have to remember to pray for men, hard to do, but I do. It is a struggle and the LORD does send refreshment time to time. All we are asked to do is be patient and endure, that's hard to do too. Just makes me desire Christ all the more. Stay true and stay loving, looking to His second coming!

[Reply](#)

Denise Daniels on December 5, 2016 at 9:51 pm

I think people are attending church less because they are not getting anything out of it. They come and hear some singing, hear a message, give their money and leave. There's no longer community within the church. You hardly ever see small groups anymore. The teenagers come to church and they're either sleep or on their phones viewing social media sites while service is going on.

The Pastors seem so far removed from the congregation. Years ago, the Pastor would at least shake the parishioners hands after church, now they don't even do that. They come in only to preach their message and then they go back to their plush offices immediately after. It seems to me that we've lost the art of touching people and showing people that we really do care about them.

I am saddened and burdened at what I see happening in the church. There are so many gifted and talented people sitting in the congregation but no one is taking time out to find out what their gifts and callings are anymore. We leave everything up to one man/woman who stands in the front and say what, "Thus saith the Lord."

What happen to choirs? Now we have praise teams. A few individuals who are designated to LEAD the congregation in worship. But if the truth be told many of these "praise leaders" are not worshippers! Therefore, it comes across as entertainment not ministry. So why leave my house to be entertained in the "Church" I myself would rather stay home.

I pray the church gets back to the model that Jesus wants for his Bride because clearly what we see today is NOT it.

Reply

Dianna Willis on November 5, 2016 at 3:26 pm

Every Sunday they talk about how they can appeal to young affluent families and how the influential families have moved out of the neighborhood leaving renters and old people. I am working middle class old with adult children who have their own families now. I leave church every time with my head down feeling kicked. I dread

going. If you are the 60 percent in the middle no one wants you.

Reply

dm on October 4, 2016 at 1:10 am

I've struggled going to church over the past few years. I go on Sundays, but it's a struggle getting there any other day.

First off, my church is a megachurch. Good luck finding community at a megachurch, especially if you're an introvert.

A number of times, I've gotten involved in ministry, and a person ends up trying to micromanage me....or pressures me to go beyond my comfort zone and experience level....or snaps at me out of the blue when I don't even know them...or makes executive decisions about my commitment level, without consulting me.

When I was a Catholic, no one pressured me. When I attended a church of about 300 people, they never micromanaged me.

To be clear, I can only count a half dozen people at church who've caused me grief...maybe 10, over about 30 years. So, that's not too bad. (we're all human, not perfect) But, I still don't feel motivated to put myself out there again.

I am also upset to see that the church doesn't follow church discipline. They need to see the church as a flock of sheep. If a person is living in blatant, unrepentant sin, they're a danger to the sheep and should be removed. Or if they are sheep, they should be called to repentance, removed from ministry, and asked to

come in for counseling each week. But, to keep them in ministry is a Seal of Approval, before the eyes of the congregation.

So, I've visited a smaller church in the area, but it's mostly married couples.

Right now, I sense a lot of pressure from family to join their new church, which is Calvinist. But, I lean more toward Arminianism.

So, right now, I feel like the unwise virgin. Christ is returning soon, and I'm not HOT, but lukewarm. :/ Not FILLED, but barely making it.

Reply

JonDavid Partain on November 12, 2016 at 10:28 am

Thank you, dm, for such an honest and transparent response. As a church leader I struggle between not becoming intrusive, versus promoting an accountability that promotes tough, love-saturated discipleship. (Hope that made sense)

Reply

dm on November 12, 2016 at 4:05 pm

JonDavid, thank you for your comments. That makes sense.

I've been on both sides. I've tried to gently lead friends in the right direction when they were off track. And I've longed for someone to come along side to help me get back on track. If the person shares their struggle, it's an open door. Maybe even a cry for help?

God bless!

Reply

Mary on July 20, 2017 at 6:07 pm

If you come back to the Catholic Church, you will find the True Presence of the One True God! We would gladly welcome you back.....and though we are a church of sinners, we are not perfect, we do try to follow the Word of God! And all of our beliefs are in line with the Holy Bible. We don't have megachurches, though some of our churches are pretty big and others are small. We offer Masses on Saturday afternoons/evenings and Sunday throughout the day (less Masses at smaller churches, of course!) so it is easier to people to worship even if they have to work on the weekends. We do not come to Mass to be entertained, but to worship and to receive Jesus Christ, His Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity, in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. Read John 6:26 If you want to get involved, there are plenty of opportunities, and I imagine you could find something that an introvert would like. Praying for you!

Reply

Rod Koop on September 26, 2016 at 2:28 pm

Carey...you wrote, "of course, church attendance is never the goal." Which is diametrically opposed to the fact that church attendance is almost always the goal. There's something here that lacks honesty. Can you clarify?

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on September 26, 2016 at 9:33 pm

Well I hope it doesn't lack honesty. it's just if you realize the mission behind every church, you grow. When you grow, you have a larger attendance. That's the point. Hope this helps.

Reply

Rod Koop on September 26, 2016 at 10:36 pm

It does help, and makes sense as well. I do work with a lot of pastors from many different backgrounds, and though they work very hard to separate attendance as the driver for anything they do, the majority and most honest ones candidly admit they are never able to fully separate their motives from this goal. Thankfully, God is grace-filled and covers this and oh so much more! Appreciate your response.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on September 27, 2016 at 6:05 am

So true Rod. I think you've zeroed in on the key: motive. The right result with the right motive = powerful.

Reply

Mike Slaney on August 28, 2016 at 7:34 pm

Reading a few posts here I to must agree with them. I am up in age, very well versed in the scriptures and I love the word of GOD, esp., the Greek, far better than the English. But over all I must agree with the many here on this site. THERE IS A FAMINE IN THE LAND WHEN IT COMES TO THE WORD OF GOD! I have been to many assemblies in Chattanooga TN, and find virtually all feed pabulum, I am fed up with pabulum(no pun intended) I prefer some MEAT and please keep the grain.

Most of these Hirelings have Degrees, but teach like children. The emphasis in many Assemblies today is bad music(I mean 7/11 and now more) hype, lights,

uninterruptible babel, theater type seats, rock type music with body gyrations, compromise in holiness, biblical nakedness, questionable vocabulary, and more! Now, you wonder why people are leaving. These assemblies are of the daughters of Babylon, off spring of the Mega whore of Babylon the mother. (as stated in REV)

Of course I have been called , a legalist, God cop, a critic and you name it. In return with love say, WHERE? Verses that deals with Holiness, forget, or If eating meat offends my brother, takes a joke, If we love one other, keep my commandments, Oh boy you are a legalist! don't forget, he that walks in the flesh is an enemy of GOD, Now, your judgemental! These are some of the things I am battling with, do I get angry, yes i do, do i let my wife know it, O yeah, do i let GOD know it, boy, do I. Do i get angry at GOD, yes I do! But I still LOVE them all, and I wish GOD would just stop being slow!

Reply



Kate Koch on July 31, 2016 at 10:34 am

We quit going to our church because they were focused on making it more "cool" and spending more time worrying about traditional versus contemporary – pushing the traditional services out to make room for contemporary. Maybe it's the way of the world, but by pushing out the traditional members, they are also pushing out the long time (and reliable) church members.

Reply

Marcus Taylor on July 22, 2016 at 9:43 pm

Why not just go to find truth and bounce ideas off other Christians?
Activities are what you do outside church, talking to your unsaved friends and trying to make a difference in your sphere of life.

[Reply](#)

Marcus Taylor on July 22, 2016 at 8:35 pm

I have a lot of years as Christian under my belt and Bible studies have shown me that I generally know more than most pastors. When others see this they try to get me into different positions within the church. Thing is I don't work to other peoples rules, position doesn't interest me and neither does being a puppet to line the churches lying pockets.

A Christian revolution is going to happen and we are coming out of Babylon, the churches are all corrupt at the core with enough teaching slipped in to confuse and drive away less developed Christians. The beast doesn't care about turnover of people as long as the money keeps coming in but soon there will be a clear divide between Christians that follow truth without an agenda and those that want to buy the stairway to heaven.

Over a 25 year period (from a child) I have been involved and studied all the main denominations. I've taken the elements of truth and the best parts from them and discarded the nonsense. Me and other Christians will use it to help build the true non politically correct church. I doubt I'll be welcome in a normal church by the end of 2017. Better hated in truth than loved in error.

[Reply](#)

Vicki Hanes on June 26, 2016 at 12:15 pm

Rather than a priesthood of believers it has become a priesthood of a few paid staff. There is little opportunity for responsibility of the vision by lay people. If you aren't a paid, polished professional, your ideas and/or presentation are not seen as "God's best." So, you go where you are God's best, which may not be inside the organizational structure. Not necessarily a bad thing, because you learn or see a different way of "going out." But you do have less time to spend sitting, listening to someone else talk or sing about God.

Reply



Luke on December 30, 2016 at 10:31 am

Vicki,

Your concern is common. However, I'd invite you to consider asking yourself, would you seek medical advice from your attorney, or legal advice from your doctor?

The thing is, God has given different gifts to different people. Ontop of those gifts is schooling, training, and experience. Lets face it, the staff is engaged with their church on a daily basis, 5-6 days a week, multiple hours a day. Laity on the other hand is engaged with their church 104 hours a year, IF they attend worship and some sort of group (averaging an hour each per week) EVERY week. Would you go to a doctor that practiced medicine 104 hours a year? Less likely I'm sure.

Additionally, I'd personally suggest to any church leader that the vision should come from God through Scripture, and not from the staff OR laity. For me, I am less bothered when a trained experienced staff is discerning God's vision for His church as He has called them to do.

So for me, the issue isn't staff leading the vision, it's staff not being able to engage or equip laity to carry out the vision. Ephesians 4 lays out that the ministers (to sum up the list Paul gives) are to equip the saints (laity) for the work of the ministry. I believe a part of that equipping is using their gifts, training and experience to equip the laity with the vision. Which it sounds like what your staff is doing.

It sounds like the struggle is, your staff is also doing the work of the ministry for the laity instead of equipping them and walking alongside of them in the work of the vision.

Reply



Brad Reis on May 4, 2017 at 7:35 pm

Couldn't have said it better, Luke! I've been around some great leaders and their motivation to engage people to serve in their area of giftedness is beautiful to watch. When a leader gets better the entire church gets better. Conversely, the leader who either desires to do it all or micromanages his or her team, is not producing ownership, but simply volunteers instead. Hence, the foundation of the church is very thin to say the least. Leaders, protect your values and what God has called you to do. Don't allow them to be hijacked. And preach the Word of God in season and out of season in order that the power of the gospel will produce godly repentance. Never give up. In due time you will reap a harvest!

Reply



YoungChurchLeaders (<http://youngchurchleaders.org>) on May 9, 2016 at 10:22 pm

GREAT stuff! I'd add, "why come physically when I can experience it Socially?" (Facebook, online streaming, etc.) AMAZING preaching and worship experiences are available in your living room like never before. So when people prioritize the church experience above the church gathering (relationships), meeting physically becomes unnecessary. But what an AMAZING opportunity to point people to Jesus through Social media experiences and teach the necessity of relationships through this avenue. As always, keep writing!

Reply

Bloodshed on February 13, 2017 at 5:39 pm

To answer your question I'd say that when people come together physically, there's a real connection between believers. The online streaming experiences don't cut it for several other reasons, one of which is that people view it like a show or some kind of an episode. If they don't like the preaching they could simply turn it off. It's not completely a bad thing if the sermon teaches heresies but in the world and the culture that we live in people tend to be more keen to listen to diluted or totally false Scripture interpretations than the real deal that sometimes shocks and awes you to provoke a positive Godly change in one's life. Among believers we're called to exhort, support, help one another grow in Christ. How is that done through social media? Most often than not it leads to bickering and quarrels and even disguised insults. Secondly we're called to be the light of the world; how's someone going to achieve that by giving attention to online experiences? Action speaks louder than words. Scripture instructs us to be doers of the word not only hearers. To me, unless the person is severely handicapped or lives in a place where it cannot be done (or somewhere where they can't even get carpooled by fellow attendees) or for some other reason which makes it impossible or life-threatening, I'd say it's laziness.

Reply

John Atkins on May 4, 2016 at 12:48 pm

A friend sent me one of your articles. I liked it and tried to sign up for your blog... 5 times! I have yet to receive the verification eMail you say you need. Your website provides NO contact link. What gives?

Reply

HoosierConservative on April 12, 2016 at 11:41 am

I would add one simple reason for my personal household about not attending church: spiritual starvation. If every Sunday morning is a rehash of salvation for the 10 new seekers who stopped by for a visit (or another elementary lesson on not yelling at your spouse), some of us leave the service feeling like the pastor hardly noticed our presence.

As callous as this may sound, it isn't worth it to get up early and drive across town for the same nourishment we could have gotten reading Christian blogs in our pajamas at home. Yes, that sounds terrible, but it is what it is.

Reply

Marcus Taylor on July 22, 2016 at 8:36 pm

They already have your money in the bag mate, they need to make new sales.

Reply

Bloodshed on February 13, 2017 at 6:18 pm

This is just a terrible comment. That's one of the reasons why people find it unnecessary to go to church because they take it as if it's the only thing that the church is about. Instead of doing so, try to talk to the preacher after the service or during the week to see if things could change. Deserting or not voicing your concern won't change anything.

Reply

Skinnythia on March 29, 2016 at 8:17 pm

My husband and I have been deeply involved in the church all our lives. We are now in our 50's. Serving as teachers, leaders, and my husband as a deacon in several churches, we have seen quite a lot of involvement and change. We have been at the church that wanted us to be there to do all the work, and we learned when to say no.

We have found the desire for power has always been a huge downfall for the church, by the people and by pastors. But in recent years, the pastors desire for power has seemed to trump the congregation to the point that people in the church who are the tireless workers are destroyed. It seems that even when men of great faith try to help the pastors with their power or leadership problems, the men are castigated for their efforts

and that is the end of their service. When people don't agree with pastors or have a difficulty with them, pastors will even blacklist them. What a Christian thing to do! The entire church becomes a revolving door for leaving workers and others that realize the lowered ethical situation of the leadership, and new people entering, but no one asking why the back door never closes.

I realize it probably isn't every situation, but it feels like there are pastors that have an increasing problem with the need to control every aspect of their church, for their own agenda, and they want no one to 'outshine' them in any way. They are not disciple builders. The possibilities for the churches' leaderships are tremendous, but only youth have the opportunity to grow somewhat. Young and older adults have no such opportunities, as all control for anything brought to the pastors to be begun is shackled. When this occurs, what is expected? The adults will eventually see the writing on the wall, that they are not really welcome – though they may try for a while- but they will move on to find another place that they may become part of something useful. When a person truly wants to work and serve God, they will find a way – even leaving a church they love- and go somewhere else, so they can serve God, and be fulfilled in what they believe God wants them to do. If it happens too much, the next place may not be a church.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on March 30, 2016 at 3:55 am

Thanks for this note...I appreciate your honesty but also the heart behind it. Your experience is so disappointing. As a leader, I understand the desire for control but also the need for freedom...I am so sorry your experience tipped the other way. Pray for grace, would you, for pastors and leaders? We need it.

[Reply](#)

Mike Slaney on August 28, 2016 at 7:41 pm

I have a heavy heart with you, and I feel that pain and our LORD is the only one who can fill the void and help the pain. He just calls us to be faithful and endure, oh, that does hurt.

[Reply](#)

Christina Joy Gilley on March 27, 2016 at 11:05 am

My 3 year old and I went to Sunday School this morning but we skipped the church service. Why? Because it is Easter and everyone was dressed like a photo shoot from GQ and we only had jeans to wear. Also, my son doesn't behave very well in our extremely quiet services and some weeks I'm just too tired to physically wrestle with him to sit in the pew and refrain from making noises.

[Reply](#)

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on March 27, 2016 at 1:47 pm

I can empathize Christina. Just a word of encouragement. I wore jeans to our church today, and I lead it. Don't let your worry take you out.

[Reply](#)**Brad Reis** on May 4, 2017 at 7:47 pm

Go God. I totally agree. Please tell me that the church doesn't look down on blue jeans. If so, I'm wearing shorts next time I preach. It's a bit sad that the seeker typically enters our church looking for genuine friendships and we, as believers, do our best to make it hard for them to enter the kingdom of God by vetting them out based on worldly standards (appearance). Christina, I'll take a million of YOU!

[Reply](#)**vblow** on August 22, 2016 at 5:54 pm

Find a church that has a Children's Church taught on their level. Then your child will love going to church and you will love taking him. Believe me, those churches exist and so do those that don't care if you wear jeans or shorts.

[Reply](#)**JD Minerella** on March 21, 2016 at 12:20 pm

I think we are missing the most important reason. Lack of any kind of anointing. Most churches today are glorified rec. centers. It's become all about programming and keeping people entertained. Our pastors have become nothing more than motivational speakers. Our church services are set up to get people in and out so they lack depth. Church has become so man centered that it leaves little room for God at all. I stopped caring about how many people came a long time ago. My focus now is to create an atmosphere where people are growing more intimate in their relationships with each other and with God. When people have a passion for God and each other the church will thrive. People who are on fire for God don't miss church.

Reply

Marcus Taylor on July 22, 2016 at 8:40 pm

Unless people there start trying to manipulate them.

Reply

Dan Sparling on March 14, 2016 at 1:25 pm

For some, the decline itself becomes a reason. People they used to look forward to seeing are gone en masse. Empty pews beget empty pews.

Reply

Guest on March 12, 2016 at 12:01 pm

Seems many Christians behave no different than secular or Agnostic folks, one example: Donald Trump says he is a good Christian. Evangelicals have little credibility these days when one cannot tell the difference in some of them and an Atheist and Non-Christians. I feel bad for Jesus. He does not deserve people using his label and name in vain like this.

Reply

notniceslims on February 28, 2016 at 2:34 pm

We also have to account for the overwhelming number of folks not attending church having witnessed or having experienced (as 'victims') poorly managed interpersonal encounters either as members or as participants in service groups in church.

Folks want to come to church to find strength for their journeys; they want to come in partake in an atmosphere of never-ending joy, lasting peace, infectious hope for better outcomes and the assurance of the continuous support of a loving family of God.

But when they get to witness various scandals, unsavory examples of what 'christian living' should not be, contentions of various kinds, double-standard living in both laity and clergy etc; they reliably start losing trust (sadly not only in the leadership/followers but also) in the entire institution. Nobody wants to take chances with their lives hence we start seeing littler and littler of them as they opt for other environments.

But, scale up the scenario to accommodate those who'd been unfortunate enough to have had repeated experiences of various low standard Christianity over a couple of places and you have people who are ready to "quit all churches all together while trusting nobody who calls themselves church workers/leaders ever again!".

While we can not control every aspect of people's interactions with one another, it might be best to focus on teaching people how best to walk Christlike in the spirit, to love without dissimulation, seeking the best of one another while trying to return back to the Savior's pattern and the pure agape standards espoused in the Pauline Letters.

Tall order, but if achieved, am sure we would have a revival and Spiritual outpouring of epic proportions on our hands.

Reply

Guest on March 12, 2016 at 12:09 pm

Your comment was right on. It reminds me of when I was invited to a prayer meeting and all they did was condemn the Democrats, Politicians, The President and promote their right wing political agenda. This was more of a focus than Jesus. It was as if Jesus was totally irrelevant in their church or lives and they looked to Politics and their favorite Politician as their savior and god. Needless to say I did not go back to that so called prayer meeting. If I want to hear politics and political strife I can get it from Fox New, CNN or MSNBC all day. Christians can argue, be petty and mean with the rest of them. I don't need to go to church and mingle with people who spew that crap.

pappawtom on February 26, 2016 at 9:27 am

Through the history of churches there have always been periods of growth and then periods of shrinking. Look around at all the different churches in a community and ask yourself why are there so many different ones out there and you will find they are there because we as people do not agree on everything and end up leaving one church for another or to start another. Our human nature is to blame for that since we usually are opinionated.

We as Christians are trying to tell the world that we love them because we have the love of the Father in us but we do not get along and that message is being received more than any other by the world. We as individuals are getting tired of all this backbiting that goes on in churches in the name of God. As the songwriter said, "I would rather see a sermon than hear one any day." The world is watching!

When you read the Bible you get the sense, and rightly so, that it is not about church since it was the "church" that killed Jesus but rather it is about our personal experience with the Lord. We are the temple as stated in the Bible and those that love the Father have the Father in them.

Churches were started after Jesus ascended to Heaven and even in the Bible there were problems in the churches as evidenced by Paul's writings. Maybe the local church would do better if they simply focused on making the church experience a place of rest and encouragement for the weary Christian and less a place to go to to get your sword sharpened! The Bible does not tell us that we are to fight God's battles but we are to be obedient to His Will and do His bidding as He gives it to us. He will take care of the enemy if we just obey and trust Him for our needs rather than our wants. We were never promised to get wealthy, as a matter of fact Jesus said that is it easier for camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to go to Heaven!

Let go of everything and let God lead you through the Holy Spirit is the mission of the church and when we stray from that then people stray from the church.

[Reply](#)

vblow on August 22, 2016 at 6:14 pm

True with the back-biting and clickishness... If there is such a word... We moved across several states, found a church and began attending Wednesday night studies and Sunday services. I worked diligently during each monthly dinner staying until nearly two pm cleaning. My spouse made an off hand comment about our little mini Aussie enjoying some icing leftover from a cake... Nothing I made was touched again. It was blatant too. Would they know my dishes come from near scalding dishwasher setting.. Doubtful since dishes at church are washed in lukewarm water with no need for gloves or rinsing in diluted bleach.

[Reply](#)

Brad Reis on May 4, 2017 at 7:54 pm

So we'll said! As someone also said, Jesus didn't didn't make an emphasis on getting the people to come to the church, but that the church would go out to the people! If a church is only about gathering people, they will miss the beauty of the Great Commission.

[Reply](#)



GMC3MOM (<http://www.genamccown.com>) on February 25, 2016 at 11:38 am

My concern with #9 is the idea of what engagement looks like. If we have a church with minimal programs, and a large body how do we engage everyone, or involve them in a way where their role in the church is meaningful to them? I see a movement of churches wanting to scrap down to brass tack basics, but then wonder why no one is engaged. We've take away the various avenues in which they would be engaging and investing in the church. We need to find the balance between intentional programs that will engage people into community, where they build trust and relationships, and then through that trust they will become invested into the body of the church.

The culture has changed, we can't expect the unchurched to understand how to plug into the church as the rest of us do. The culture has also changed to where those invested believers don't want to just sit in the pews week to week, they want to be active members of the body.

We need to be spiritual gift testing our members and creating avenues where all can serve. Let's change the #'s from 10% doing 90% of the work. To 100% invested, 100% actively working in the church in some capacity.

Reply

Marcus Taylor on July 22, 2016 at 8:43 pm

You could start by spending more time in practical studies where everyone can speak in groups as part of the service rather than it all being about a handful of people.

[Reply](#)

Cheryl on January 29, 2016 at 1:43 am

Irrelevance. Many churches are now led by the very old. As a single parent, i was never let into the "inner circle" and made to feel less than sufficient. I just got tired of it. There also seems to be a huge disconnect with reality. The last small group I attended (now years ago), the leaders wife, in response to a question to the group about how we could give more, to be more of a help to the poor, was, "You know I get that, I look at my seven sets of tableware and now I'm thinking, do I really need 7?" I was so stunned, I nearly fell off my chair. There were very very poor single moms in that group who walk miles and miles because the extra \$3 in bus fare buys 2 litres of milk for their kids. I found myself wondering why I hung out with them two or three times a week. Now I don't go at all. Is Christianity real for you? I'm tired of hearing that there are broken people everywhere and the people at church are just human beings. Let me tell you this: if I don't see a difference between bible believing Christians huddled together on a Sunday morning and a random bunch of thugs hanging out at the 7-11 on Friday night, it's unlikely you'll see me on Sunday huddled in there with them (on the periphery, along with the other single parents).

[Reply](#)

Marcus Taylor on July 22, 2016 at 8:49 pm

Most Christians talk a good game, but there are the odd ones that do try and help where possible. They are usually the ones that don't keep talking about how to help as it doesn't take a lot of working out. Why didn't the poor mom's form a little group where you could all be realistic about things you could

do? It's not all about money, showing Jesus love and letting people know he died for them is the great commission. You can do that the same as anyone else.

Reply

Jason Anthony on November 29, 2015 at 11:11 am

I don't go because people are ever increasingly going for the wrong reasons. There are wolves in church and church is a place to get away from that. I would rather stay home in quite peace. Yes! The Sabbath Day is to be kept Holy. I am sure I will be held accountable for this. The other reason I don't go is that it can complicate life on several unseen levels. The Devil and his minions are all about. The closer I get, the more chaotic my home and life become. I have had church leaders tell me I need meds. Like I said about staying home-I can stay here and be at peace and not socialize with the unexpected.

Reply

IXQUS (<http://ixqus.com/>) on December 3, 2015 at 9:20 pm

Now it was the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem, and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the temple, in Solomon's porch. Then the Jews surrounded Him and said to Him, "How long do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly."

Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me. But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one."

– John 10:22-30 NKJV

Accountability is an interesting thing. Justice is a conclusion, a point of recompense, and doesn't necessarily speak to any certain moment now. Basically, in any waking moment, you're well able to do just about anything you please. We all are.

The gift of the Spirit is such that if you choose to listen, if you wanted to leave the comfort of home and find challenges that help you grow spiritually, you would likewise have discernment in order to avoid a wolf in a sheep's clothing. Sometimes your wolf is a sheep, and your sheep is a lion; part of faith is confidence, a trust in the Father, a trust in the Son, and especially a trust in self.

Nobody here may rightfully judge you; even your peers. There's one fount with the right rhythm, the right tempo, and it's always in time and on-time. Anything else is rather noisy, nor will it sound quite right, as it isn't.

Reply

Marcus Taylor on July 22, 2016 at 8:54 pm

Agreed, I try to keep leaders especially at arms length. Often if they can't use you they will try to do you down so they don't look like a failure.

Don't give up on Jesus, people out there need the truth and you might be the only person some people meet that has it in a way that is presentable to them.

At some point you will have to step out into the trenches one way or another, it's just better to do it on your own terms rather than someone else's.

Reply

nick hodge on November 1, 2015 at 9:04 pm

I've said it many times. The true Sabbath is Saturday since God rested on the 7th day. It's outlined in the Ten Commandments and is Jewish Hebrew Theology. Jesus was a Jewish Hebrew. Why does the Church follow this Sunday Vatican law they've changed around 560 a.d. (approx.)? To me, church is not just four walls. If you see me on the street and can't even acknowledge me, aren't you a hypocrite of your own right? Jesus went into brothels preaching! Try doing that now and see how downcast you get...

Reply

nick hodge on November 1, 2015 at 9:12 pm

P.s. Only follow God's laws and Jesus' teachings. For the ways of God are eternal life through hope in Jesus, but the ways of the world, and man, are destruction and death.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on November 1, 2015 at 9:59 pm

The early church started gathering on Sunday morning in the first century...it was the day of resurrection.

Reply

nick hodge on November 1, 2015 at 10:09 pm

I sure hope so. I would not want to be following Vatican stuff. They try to replace God, which is what Lucifer got kicked out of Heaven for.

Reply

nick hodge on November 1, 2015 at 10:29 pm

I sure don't want to believe wrong or anything. I try to picture Jesus through the words of the Bible. Jesus really didn't like synagogues. He turned over tables at one. Churches do yard sales, food plates for sale, and other things.

Reply



Brad Reis on May 4, 2017 at 7:59 pm

Bible 101. Bingo! Many people get really confused by this Saturday and Sunday format. On another note, Apostle Paul considered every day to be just as important as the last.

Reply

Ellen on October 20, 2015 at 1:06 pm

I believe that part of #8 not seeing the direct benefit can often fall on because people want to connect with people in the church, but not be depended on every single week to do something in the church. At a church that I used to go to, it was always you should come to church more often because we need you to do x, y or z. When a church tries to utilize the same people week after week, they start to feel used and burned out. If a church needs to get more people involved to doing things in church, first, make sure that they are interested and can actually commit. Second, offer adequate training so that people aren't thrown into the ring to handle a task that they may not be familiar with. One of the things that I have to come to realize in my own life is when I attend something, I am more attentive when I am not responsible for handling tasks than when I am responsible for a task. That would be because I am focusing on what I am doing or going to do, and focusing

on my queue to step in. I then miss important or interesting points in the program or whatever the event is. I did not yet read your article on cultural changes, but I think that one of the things that churches need to start doing is recognize that there are other religions and cultures out there that people in your own congregation are connected to in some way. It would not hurt to become educated about other religions, even if you do not practice or believe in them. So, if a church is so accustomed to bashing or judging other religions because they are not Christian or perceived as non-Christian, that can rub people the wrong way and they might not come back to your church because of that. My mom is Christian and my dad was Jewish. After my dad died, my mom raised us Christian, even though we did not go to church that much. She always wanted to raise us Catholic, but never got around to it. I have gone to a variety of Christian churches, and except for the Catholic Church, the Protestant churches spent so much time judging other religions. It got to a point where that it what I believed that this is what Protestant churches do, bash and judge other religions, condemn them to hell. I have not seen that in any Catholic church that I have been to. You can imagine how that must make a person feel when they go to a church that condemns a religion or belief that a person has or practices.

Reply

Julia Hannigan on September 30, 2016 at 12:51 pm

Huh? It sounds like these Protestant churches are merely following what the Bible says. Sadly, people from other religions are going to hell unless they repent and follow Jesus. The church cannot condemn anyone – people condemn themselves. All the church can do is point them to the truth. Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. John 14:6

Reply

Annika S. on December 18, 2016 at 10:37 am

This attitude is what's wrong with church members today. Too much judgement and "my way and only my way" Oh, and the holier than thou gun rights people. 'Cause of course Jesus would own an arsenal if he came back today.

Reply

Brett Starr on October 19, 2015 at 1:32 pm

Not sure if this has been said yet, but I wonder if, with those who love the church and who regularly attend church, the root problem is that they don't understand or have not been taught the authority of the Word of God. So when it says in Hebrews 10:24,25 "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." it is seen as a good suggestion from the church they love and not the authority of and from the God they love.

Reply



Brian Zehr on September 30, 2015 at 10:53 am

I know i am late to the conversation but i really appreciate this article as well as the additional resources. I find that many committed church attendees see the end result as what the church offers in its programs instead of the on-going transformation of Christ. Unfortunately church cultures often seem to emphasize “steps” and programs so people hear of transformation but catch attendance and involvement. If only we can get our culture aligned to where our behaviors match our values. If we do, maybe engagement in church on a more regular basis has a chance.

Reply

Greg Kittredge on September 20, 2015 at 6:35 pm

What we suffer from is a deficient ecclesiology as well as the lack of a deeply passionate love for Jesus. Unfortunately, blogs like this are what can unwittingly foster the idea that everyone is an expert when it comes to the theology of the church or theology in general. Why is it that when it comes to brain surgery, we would feel foolish trying to tell the doctor how to do his job. But when it comes to the church, everyone no matter what level of training in the Bible or theology, feel free to speak as an expert. How deluded for instance to say that I love and am committed passionately to Christ and yet on the other hand to speak as though I do not need to be just as equally committed to and passionate toward His Body, the Church. How grotesque to suggest that we love the Head but do not equally love His Body. An organic relationship exists between Christ and his Church.

They cannot be separated. To love one is to love the other. To despise the one is to despise the other. So real is this connection that the apostle John in his first epistle teaches that one of the indicators of Christian impostors is that they do not love the brethren and do not have fellowship with the body of believers– i.e. “they went out from us because they were not of us.” The Church as the universal Body of Christ as well as the gathered local body of believers is God’s idea. I don’t know, I think that what the writer of Hebrews says still stands– but just call me one of those old-fashioned Bible thumpers: “And let us consider how to stimulate one

another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near." (10:24,25). Could it possibly be that the elephant in the room—the thing few seem willing to say— is that the North American church is backslidden? That instead of capitulating to the downward trend of church attendance and involvement, we should uphold the standard of God's Word no matter how many bristle at it? It is certainly true that the "day" the writer to the Hebrews was referring to is closer now than when he first wrote. Then certainly, we should be meeting together "all the more", not less. Or maybe I'm just getting ever-changing cultural shifts confused with the unchanging eternal truth of God's Word.

Reply

IXQUS (<http://ixqus.com/>) on September 23, 2015 at 5:23 am

Technically the Day draws nearer continually. Imposters may be many, but even bona fides to some may mean a preposterous requirement of proof. Even then, it wouldn't be enough for others. And someone required to view the Bible as inerrant in all ways finds themselves with a load of working contradictions.

God's ideas are unfathomable to the mortal mind. It's difficult enough for people to understand their own written doctrines and the bonds of their covenants which if held to with a bi-directional binding would be a curse, it would be death. Before Him, when drawing lines in the sand with respect to one's own or anyone else's judgment, there is little perspective on the part of society which would impart its own requirement for being compos mentis. There is little to be prideful of, when not a thought in one's head is one that is much more unique than any other one's kind has, let alone what the Father might in the time it takes to form such a thought. And still, there is hope, believers can one day even judge the angels.

We're left largely to self in our judgments. Stuff like adhering to the Bible should be secondary to one's own understanding from a relationship with God. Plenty of people imagine such things. They often enough think themselves into their beliefs or imagine it. Yet, there really is God, beyond the realm of madness, beyond chaos and confusion, beyond the noise floor of reality.

Many people claim to speak for Him. Nevertheless, true Authority rests with God. The Word isn't some recent idea, it was in the beginning as it is now. Not with the formation of some big ball of mud, but ancient in such a way as to defy enumeration. The Day many people think of as the End is one that is lost with people always looking ahead to their past, conjuring up all sorts of ideas for when and what that is.

"Remember this, and show yourselves men;
Recall to mind, O you transgressors.
Remember the former things of old,
For I am God, and there is no other;
I am God, and there is none like Me,
Declaring the end from the beginning,
And from ancient times things that are not yet done,
Saying, 'My counsel shall stand,
And I will do all My pleasure...'

Mortal pleasure has an end. And immortal pleasure isn't a guarantee. Would it be that one would have unending glee if they can simply flee the pleasure of sin we let in? Not if then this pleasure would cut the Body off at even one knee.

Faith is one that holds conviction, even if only in passing or even when facing certain death. No true doctrine should put one of God's children in harm's way. Yet some parts of the Body still support politicians and even leaders that take on banners of both extremes of things, up to and even abortion. These things are abhorrent without any written rules, so what is it do we think that God sees? Should

we need an obnoxious sign from the heavens, some catastrophic end, for this not to be? Just because a law allows it and such people exist, should any of that be necessary for a society with a faith firmly rooted by the reality of their beliefs?

Does any man think he has Authority over the Gate? Is it that one can walk to the door and tell those passing by whom can and whom cannot enter? No man, yet there is an endless line of those that think they could take that for which is not rightfully their own, making rites and covenants with death, on their own accord. What should come of those that try to hop over the fence?

Even still, God doesn't have to send hail and brimstone to destroy. A false doctrine doesn't stand the test of time. That's simply because the truth needs no defense, it literally speaks for itself. Even if humanity were reset, it survives even a loss of record. There are those that know it and go their entire lives telling nobody about it. Does that make them apostate? Are they unworthy of being saved? Those that are most vocal can often use God as a lever. Should they also be held unworthy?

If one is to speak for God on matters of such profound consequence for all parties, they better be right. Find a man who would like to take a perfect stand, and you will find a Devil waiting to fall. Jesus didn't and people killed him simply for making them think. Even the truth of what may come of one that knows God and denies Him would be enough for some. So then, in the End, should the Son come with a sword or a shield? Based on the criteria of many people's expectations, He would need to turn into superman and by those merits might as well also wear a cape. Nonetheless, even if He came a second or hundredth time, nobody, and I mean not a single person would know, without first having His Spirit with them.

Reply

David Ish on September 8, 2015 at 8:24 pm

"I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ."

— Mahatma Gandhi

He might have been living in Pgh Pa. I am a church drop out I am 57

Reply

Marcus Taylor on July 22, 2016 at 9:12 pm

A true Christian is Christ like, most just have a form of godliness.

Think of it like athletics, if everyone did what they learned in gym class there would be no top athletes as a basic teacher doesn't know bio mechanics or human physiology or psychology and they probably never achieved much themselves. The guy that loves his sport so much that he will do whatever it takes to be the best even if it means ignoring conventional wisdom which will only take you so far will be the one that is ultimately better than the rest.

To be a Christian takes not just looking at Christ but practising to be like him and so breeding more understanding and better ability to do God's will, it's a positive circle. This would mean ignoring those that have got so far and are happy with their place, ultimately we can never believe we are where we need to be spiritually only that we are moving in the right direction.

It's probably easier to focus on not doing the wrong things such as being unnecessarily angry or harbouring grudges etc.

It's easy to look like a Christian in the modern sense but actually being the real deal is a career in itself. Don't give up!!
At 57 you are still young enough to become an 80 year old Christian guru.

Reply

Ellie on September 6, 2015 at 2:59 am

Read Todd Horigans post (posted 1 mth ago) about shift workers. I am in UK but in similar position I'm a nurse on permanent nightshift 4 on then 4 off. I would love to attend every Sunday morning but doing this in the middle of 12hr nightshifts is hard. My rota means I can attend 5 Sundays then there are 3 I can't without making myself very tired at work that night. To become a full member you must attend a course every Wednesday for a good few months which I can't do either neither can my future son in law who is in the Army, when he spoke to the pastor about this his reply was can't they adjust your duty!! We can't all as soldiers, nurses etc just expect our duty to be adjusted to suit rigid church services but it is a problem when it means you cannot become a full member of your church, there are 700 in our congregation do they all do Mon-Fri 9-5 or are they all fortunate enough not to have to work??

Reply

Marcus Taylor on July 22, 2016 at 9:14 pm

Why do you want to be a full member? Will it make you a better Christian?

If Jesus rules your life you are a full member of the church, don't worry about pleasing some man made organisation flying the Christian flag.

Reply

Julia Hannigan on September 30, 2016 at 1:07 pm

Shift workers have it very tough. Could you ask your pastor if you might be able to do the membership class online or at an alternate time? If the pastor cannot accommodate you in some way, I would seek another church if membership is important to you.

Reply

Scott on August 30, 2015 at 2:50 pm

I discovered your blog this morning and have spent an astonishing amount of time (3+ hours) delving into past entries. I have come away from this, admittedly cursory, examination with this opinion: you have little, if any, experience with the NON-churched like me. Your analysis of the reasons for and the solutions to the decline in church attendance indicate a deep-seated ignorance about people like myself.

I have read the bible cover-to-cover twice now and will begin again soon, but while I have found much that is interesting and even inspiring, in the main I have failed to find the source of awe that motivates yourself and those around you.

In contrast, the laws of physics as currently understood, most strongly suggest that the iron in my blood and the gold in the ring I wear on my finger were created in the cores of exploding stars and that the atoms in my right hand came from different stars than those in my left. This thought generates an almost overwhelming sense of awe in me.

You may succeed in showing a few “lost souls” back to your church (or even THE Church) through the “map” you offer, but I seriously doubt you will influence those who were never “lost”, don’t accept that they have a “soul” that can get “lost”, and those who believe they were born right the first time. And until you are reconciled to the fact that these fundamental differences exist and must be acknowledged, you will only see your church’s membership decline with the aging of the population.

Reply

Andreas on January 8, 2016 at 8:13 am

Interesting points. Of course, that people have rejected the notion of a personal soul, a personal God and a host of other “religious things” through the ages have little or nothing to do with pastors trying to tell of the Good News of Christ. Jesus didn’t exactly have a huge following at the cross, as you have read yourself.

Yes, physics and the natural sciences do indeed provide much information that is awesome. I’m not sure that they have declared it a fact that life evolved from matter. In fact, I’m confident that they haven’t. So there is that.

Understand that God draws all people to himself. That is how it works. Some resist, some don't. It usually takes a tragedy for people to see this, but no matter. The Bible is but one way that God can draw people to himself. A pastor is another. God moves in mysterious ways and one day you will have a chance to reject or accept him. Choose wisely.

Reply

Marcus Taylor on July 22, 2016 at 9:30 pm

I wouldn't worry too much about unproven laws of physics, if Stephen Hawkins was as bright as he makes out he would have found a cure for his disease rather than daydreaming about universal expansion, blue shift and time travel.

Just because people are going to church doesn't mean their souls aren't lost, many of them don't get the Bible either.

It is sort of in a code that you won't really understand if you do not have the Holy Spirit. That is why pastors can easily mislead a lot of people and use fear tactics to control them.

The standard churches are referred to as Babylon in Revelation and they are full of corruption. People want to find God and the truth but they realise they are only getting a diluted version mixed with error. Even though they might not know exactly what is wrong they can sense it is there. I was the same, in and out of church for years, now I know enough to put my finger on things but it has taken 25 years. I actually think church congregations will increase as terrorism increases but that isn't necessarily a good thing. Satan is controlling all the pieces on both sides of the chess board, it's a case of people picking their flavour of whatever makes them feel good.

Surely you know enough to know that homosexuality and divorce are not acceptable from what you have read?? Yet many churches don't have a problem with it. To me that is worst than being atheist!! If you are going to follow something, follow it, don't change it to suit yourself.

[Reply](#)

Scott on August 30, 2015 at 1:53 pm

"Even among people who say THEIR love the church..."!??

Do you actually expect me to take you seriously when you don't even care enough about your message to proof read your own work?

[Reply](#)

Korgul on August 23, 2015 at 10:26 am

#1 is completely wrong. Replace it with, "More people realizing that all religion is man-made nonsense."

[Reply](#)

Scott on August 30, 2015 at 2:00 pm

Spot on! CN needs to address the positive correlation between the number of years of higher education received and the likelihood that an individual will lack any religious faith.

[Reply](#)

Andreas on January 8, 2016 at 8:18 am

Well, Christianity claims that the more people trust themselves (and their wonderful diplomas or talents or abilities) they don't see a need for God...which says nothing concerning whether God exists or cares about them.

Believing has nothing to do with education or talents or abilities, or the lack thereof. We don't believe in God because he fills in our lack of understanding. We believe in God because we believe that he is real and true and beautiful.

[Reply](#)

IXQUS (<http://ixqus.com/>) on January 9, 2016 at 4:23 am

The truth is that if you don't have faith in yourself, then your faith in God sits on equally shaky ground. Taking the leap of faith is having the confidence for going from point A to point B, then actually going in the right direction. By that, for where your faith is placed will dictate the acceptance of obstacles to navigate fully or the pursuit of shortcuts to circumvent.

Simply put, one has to engender a trust in self, in order that their choices are fostered of by a sound mind. Faith in self and the Father are intrinsic, and it requires all of one's heart, soul, and mind.

As trust is formed, so does one's perception of self and our Father. It is when there is singular purpose that obstacles may crumble, before they're ever encountered. Sometimes the shortest path home is all the way around.

Reply

Marcus Taylor on July 22, 2016 at 9:39 pm

Or in my case when frustration has overwhelmed me I just threw caution to the wind and prayed God would help me.
I mean life is boring without risk anyway and the worst that can happen is you will die which you will anyway,

IXQUS (<http://ixqus.com/>) on January 9, 2016 at 6:40 am

There's more than what was said previously. In terms of confidence of belief, there's no separation of trusting yourself with trusting your faith. The leap spoken of is not found by way of rational thought; tethered rationality will never allow you to take any leap or with that, pull you back to where you began, once the tether tightens.

There are two basic kinds of faith. One that is knowing, with a blossomed understanding, given by the merits of growth: having been firmly planted, having taken root, being well nurtured, and producing good fruit. The other precedes it: a seed.

Believing has everything to with knocking at the door of a fertile garden and asking how to till the land. You can believe everything the gardner says, or not. When put to practice, it is by the fruit that sustenance is found. There's nothing stopping you from relying on the rains in drought, even if you're told there's a well that must be visited continually.

Taken as simply fair advice, without moving, the belief is emboldening, and still of little value outside of interesting conversation. And as the seasons turn, so do the opportunities of planting and harvesting. In the cold, rich and poor alike starve, without proper preparation or by paying or begging those that have done their due diligence.

Reply

Marcus Taylor on July 22, 2016 at 9:35 pm

There seems to be more educated people in church than ever these days. Which makes it all the more strange that they struggle to grasp the truth of certain scriptures. Few people seem to have the gifts of discernment, common sense or critical thinking.

Reply

Marcus Taylor on July 22, 2016 at 9:32 pm

Bang on!!

True Christianity is a way of life, not turning up to church for an hour listening to one man's opinions.

Reply

Lisa Major Elders on August 22, 2015 at 3:56 pm

I am wondering about the influence of living away from families. Many of us live states or countries away from our families. We are torn between caring for parents and children. Also, many of us do not have traditional Monday thru Friday work schedules. I am a minister's child who grew up attending regularly, but now I minister in a hospital and am often pulled in many different directions. For me, there are many reasons that even committed Christians are attending Sunday worship services less. Many churches have even added Sat night or other opportunities for worship to adapt to challenging schedules. But I also know that God knows my heart and He meets me wherever I am.

Reply

Phillip on August 13, 2015 at 9:39 am

Has anyone come up with a tool to measure these metrics within their churches. I would be interested in hearing from those who attend our church if these reasons for attending church less often are a reality within our community.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on August 13, 2015 at 1:39 pm

I'd love to hear the answer to this!

Reply

Todd Horrigan on August 3, 2015 at 11:51 pm

I found this in a web search to see what churches are doing today to attract regular attendees... just to see if anybody has any new ideas. I have been in and out of church(s) over the past four decades not because I don't like church, I truly love going to church, it is because of the type of work I do. I have worked the all night shifts, the Sunday shifts, the evening shifts, and the 'I-never-know-when-I-work-shifts' which is my current situation. I could never commit to any ongoing class much less get involved in any sort of regular ministry work because I knew my work schedule would interfere with such things. If I get a chance to attend a Sunday morning service, because I rarely am able to, I feel left out of the loop without any relationships with the people who attend even though I have attended that church for years and years. I see Sunday churchgoers as having been blessed to work a Monday through Friday dayshift job where they have the time to attend Sundays and weeknight events. I strongly feel that there are many unreached people who would go to church regularly if

they could, they just cannot go Sunday mornings or even Saturday nights. My search was not to see if churches changed their regularly scheduled lineup. Rather it was to see if any church has ways to reach out to the lost-at-work church members who would gladly come to church if they could.

Reply

John Crowe on July 21, 2015 at 1:30 pm

I find these 10 to focus totally on externals that we can blame for people not coming to church like we can blame for churches not gaining people to come to church.

How about looking on the inside? I would consider these.

1. The secularization of pastoral leadership whom seminaries now train in a performance and technique model of Church, Inc and thus lack any ecclesiology to think of that shapes their pastoral theology from a biblical foundation. Thus, they so often see themselves as the CEO of non-profit run like a franchise.
2. With the secularization of pastoral leadership has come the secularization of church life molded by a market driven business model which has eroded the earlier theological foundation of ecclesiology due to growing biblical illiteracy.
3. The secularization of pastoral leadership has also been seen in the lack of training in seminary concerning spiritual formation. This has resulted in churches viewing pastors less and less as spiritual leaders and to an abandonment of the spiritual formation of a church as a body.

4. The secularization of churches is being propped up by looking to church growth techniques and family systems theory to attempt to build healthy churches. We do this as if ecclesiology and the bible have nothing to do with it. Like a voice in the wilderness crying out to the contrary, there like four books asking churches to ask what does theology/the bible have to do with church health?

So, I think many of the faithful are no longer attending like they once did for they are finding less and less of the biblical/spiritual ecclesia when they go and more of a secularized religious body that has form and function without real spiritual power grounded in a biblical/theological foundation that comes from an applied ecclesiology of the church being the church by the grace of God through the empowering of the Holy Spirit which shapes the body of believers via the Word of God in a living discipleship that goes beyond just skin deep.

For more about this see my article online,

“Doctrine and Church Health” which is based on my dissertation
“Preaching for a Whole Person Response in Developing a Healthy Church.”

Reply

notniceslims on February 28, 2016 at 2:54 pm

If I may put it another way, however incompletely, people are realizing that fundamental factors are missing on so many levels in our spiritual and church lives.

While, the Church of Jesus Christ started out by the Holy Spirit and power as a Living Organism in the Book of Acts; we are systematically building Church organizations sprinkled over in places with politically-correct market strategies while incoherently spouting “Christenese” in confusion as we labor confusedly over some of the Babel Towers that we label as Christ’s.

The people may not know or may not even be able to put their finger on it right BUT they sure end up wandering off in reaction to the funny after-tastes such encounters leaves as legacies to them.

Reply

Tim Cooper on July 18, 2015 at 2:18 am

I’m a person who has undeniably moved away from the Church, despite my father and mother both being a Methodist Minister and Preacher respectively. (In England, UK). There could be cultural differences and differences of experience in what I am writing to your data but I believe that my experience has some bearing to.

I agree with a number of your points, yet I believe that there is one extra point that I could make which attaches itself to a few you have made. As technology is improving, and more exciting, and also as kids and young families would rather spend time doing sports or playing video games, or if people are simply unable to make it to Church on a Sunday. The age demographic of the church is shifting (particularly in parts of England) towards the majority of attendees being aged over 50 and in many cases over 60. As such church services are being tailored to appeal to more older members of the community, little is done to attract youth into the church, even less to retain it.

A confusion between “engaging with youth and technology” and “putting hymns on a powerpoint” exists,

especially amongst more stoic members of the church community in the UK. Simply using technology isn't a drastic change to the format of a service, and something that doesn't appeal to a child of 8+ in a hymn book as much as playing sport or watching something on youtube, might not appeal as much on a slideshow either.

I appreciate that you are advocating that churches respond to the times and adapt, I just fear that those best placed to help (namely people aged probably in their twenties or early thirties) are some of the most deterred from regularly attending, and so are thier children.

That being said I credit the ELIM Church (in which my Uncle is a Minister) in the UK as one of the only church denominations to grow in number as they have the experience and the mindset to attract and keep younger members and to remain young at heart.

Reply

Christopher Cook on July 13, 2015 at 4:53 am

Wow. I read the comments, and there are just so many things to speak to. I can't even begin to toss in 'my two cents' on them all... I don't have enough 'cents' (pardon the pun).

So, let me just share a small amount from my experience.

We go to church service at our local church every Sunday morning (barring illness, etc). However, my three teens and I do NOT any longer attend Sunday school. This is due to a recent understanding about how negatively age segregation (at that age) affects our families. I teach my teens at home. I would be completely open to all of us sitting the adult class, but to lessen the division, I chose this route. Also, we have ceased from Sunday evening worship. Honestly, this came out of a personal study that I did on what the Sabbath really means for us. I am not posting that here, but, in short, the Sabbath pre-dated the law and was for our benefit (spiritually). I decided that my family would attend Sunday morning worship, be involved with the 'personal

care home' ministries in our area on Sunday afternoons, and have family worship Sunday night (we have long had a family devotion after services Sunday night – we just expanded). Also, we often participate in Bible studies throughout the week. While many would shake their head, this has been fairly invigorating for me. Our church is not very 'ministry heavy', so it gives us a chance to put more of our time into some things that could matter in others' lives without totally ignoring the purpose for 1 day in 7.

Now, there is also the other problem. Churches today are often NOTHING like what we see in the NT. Church WAS a place to corporately worship, but MORE SIGNIFICANTLY, it was (and is/should be) a place where believers come to get support, encouragement, edification and to add their part to the body of Christ. In today's traditional American service, there is little room for this. Just saying.

Having said all of this, I LOVE the church. Not some building, but all of you wonderful and broken members of the body of Christ out there (and in here) in the world!

Remember 1 Cor 13:8. All of the questions of our day: prophecies, tongues, doctrine (yes, doctrine matters, but stay with me)... they will all pass away. Only our love will remain. In heaven, everyone will know and agree with the truth, but/and we will LOVE EACH OTHER PERFECTLY. I have said THIS recently: let me be wrong on any other number of issues, but get love right. I don't want to have 'perfect theology' and be judged one day for my lack of love. Based on the two greatest commandments and on Jesus' 'new commandment', I think love is probably pretty important.

May our love grow stronger one for another that a lost world may see us shine – not based on our church attendance, but based upon the difference they see in our lives – the difference that love makes.

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

Reply



Paul Earle on October 25, 2015 at 7:12 pm

I agree. Well said. Loving the Lord and people is the primary thing.

[Reply](#)

Bob Pace on July 12, 2015 at 4:32 am

I could give you many reasons but they point to the same thing: The death of Protestantism. Since there are now 44,000+ denominations it is kind of hard for a Protestant to talk about 'having the truth' and/or "having the faith of the early Christians". Does speaking in tongues exist or not exist? Truth matters. And you can't really say that your theology is only about 200 years old when there were Christians worshipping and living a particular way 2000 years ago (and still worshipping the same way). Especially when your theology goes completely against the Christian theology of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, etc. centuries. Look it up. Justin Martyr describes the service from about 135 AD and it is what is still practiced today in Orthodoxy. We gave the world the Bible. the Nicene Creed, the Trinitarian Theology, etc.. Your OT still uses Greek names for the books. You didn't think Genesis was a Hebrew word, did you? Look around and you will find the best and brightest of young religious Americans converting to Orthodoxy.

Eastern Orthodoxy...the best kept secret in America!

[Reply](#)

Noel Anderson on January 7, 2016 at 8:19 am

That sounds both unfair and arrogant. Our church knows, studies and respects Irenaeus, Clement, Polycarp, Athanasius, Augustine, etc. They are "ours" as much as "yours." The past 200 years has given rise to some heresies, but to ignore the work of the Holy Spirit since 1816—let alone ignoring the Spirit's

work in the Reformation—seems arrogant. Have you totally ignored Luther and Calvin? Ever heard of Karl Barth? We need our roots, yes, but only as much as we need many, large, outreaching branches.

Reply

Bob Pace on January 7, 2016 at 12:35 pm

Noel, wow. I leave a message six months ago and you flame me without one bit of real evidence. Please get a grip. I am not being unfair and arrogant. In fact, if you want to argue, then please go and find someone else to argue with. A local Orthodox priest maybe. Or, if you want, I know some lay Orthodox people for you to argue with. I just stated my experiences and beliefs. I find it more than a little interesting (and humorous) that you didn't bring up one salient, thoughtout, specific example. Just rhetoric.

I humbly ask you, if you think this is both unfair and arrogant, that you PLEASE show me biblically and from the Traditions handed down from the Apostles and NOT from people who I don't agree with and neither do any early Church Fathers. This might come as a shock to you but I, along with the Orthodox Church, don't believe the Reformation was the work of the Holy Spirit. Do you also think the slaughter of the Anabaptists by the Lutherans in the years that followed were also the work of the Holy Spirit? It's a tired trite saying but both Baptists and Assembly of God churches can not both be right. So which one is?

Read Ignatius and there is no way you can make your claims or truthfully say you are respecting him. He speaks of only unity in Christ: one bishop, one baptism, one Communion, etc. Read any of the early Saints you mentioned and you can't go down the road you just traveled without twisting their words incredibly. Look at the heresies of the new church like "once saved, always

saved” to name just one. But since you asked me, I will give you a brief. quick response. Remember, due to brevity, the following will have holes in it. This is only meant to be an attention getter. A list of things to pique someone’s (yours?) interest.

Also, I don’t ignore the work of the Holy Spirit since 1816. Nice try. I don’t think the Holy Spirit (which is why I made the comment about the 44,000+ different belief systems of protestants. You must be saying that they are all correct or that the Holy Spirit lies. You can’t have it both ways. This is why there are so many evangelicals and other protestants are coming to the Orthodox Church. People who are active members of the Orthodox Church don’t become evangelical. It is the other way around. Heck, even the Lutherans lost their no. 1 theologian Jaroslav Pelikan. Or do you believe it was the work of the Holy Spirit that led to Luther making critical errors in the execution of his own stated rules on what books should be included in the OT? Seriously?

Noel, please, I am humbly saying this. Remember, I am just a lay CONVERT. I used to be very similar to you. I am just stating what I have found to be true...and its ugly. Protestant Bible editors have changed/translated words in the NT for their particular political/religious ideologies. Heck, even Luther did that, right? We both agree that he changed a word in the bible, right? Luther also objected to the Books of James, Jude, Hebrews, and Revelation (that’s 15% of the books of the New Testament!) and didn’t want them included. Was THAT the work of the Holy Spirit???

This is not me being arrogant. I am just stating facts, historical events and what the Church believes. And since the Orthodox Church is the one started by the Apostles through Christ’s commission of St. Peter, I would say physician heal thyself. Become humble and find out for yourself. Don’t kill me, I am just the messenger. A very ill prepared one, at that.

As the Apostle Andrew said, “Come and see!”

[Reply](#)

IXQUS (<http://ixqus.com/>) on January 10, 2016 at 4:23 am

Sometimes the message is found through the resonance in reality that all are witness to. I'll use the message of the day, from BibleGateway:

But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

[Reply](#)

Helen B on July 11, 2015 at 5:21 pm

Tired of the "same old thing" every week. We need to be interactive at church, and creative.

[Reply](#)

Adam on July 7, 2015 at 9:00 am

The Church or Ekklesia is at its core the assembly of the Body of Christ in Communion with the Head, Jesus Christ. In practice, it is a place to worship God, not sit and listen. It is a place to experience corporately and privately the Grace of God and be healed. It is a hospital for sick people, not a club for elites. Americans have a very soft, cushiony idea of what true Christianity requires. We can look at the Middle East as many are being martyred, or the Russia, which has a renaissance of Classical Christianity having emerged from the yoke of state sponsored Aethism as examples of what Church means and why it matters. If church reflects the secular culture, there's no need to attend. Its not surprising that the faster shrinking denominations are also the ones that have adopted the modern liberal march to "progress".

Reply

Travis on July 6, 2015 at 10:16 am

People "used to" love the church – the sacred space, holiness, spirituality, communion with God, reverence, devout prayer, meditation and soul inspiring worship but all is being traded for musical theater, rock concerts, big screen tv, dancing, lights-camera-action, and fellowship with our neighbors – all of which is available outside the walls of the contemporary Christian "concert halls" If the inside is no different than the outside there is no longer a reason to come inside.

Reply

judymlowder on July 10, 2015 at 5:24 pm

Travis, your description of what church used to be is what I crave today. For that one hour I want to worship, to glorify God, to commune, to send my soul soaring up to Him, or to look quietly within. Worship and communion allow me to be restored. In my opinion that's the purpose of church: Worship. All the other activities are nice to have but reverent, sacred worship is what it's all about. That's how I get renewed, refocused and re-centered on Christ.

Reply

Bob Pace on July 12, 2015 at 4:18 am

Then you should go East young man! Go to the Church Jesus Christ set up. The faith given to the Apostles and handed down to us. Depending where you are, I would suggest a former EOC parish (a convert parish made up of evangelicals that came into The Church in the mid-80's.

Reply

Odessa on July 6, 2015 at 4:32 am

Here's my list:

1. Wolves in the pulpit. Or immature, ungodly, shallow men in the pulpit. Take your pick.
2. Manipulation and guilt-tripping a.k.a. spiritual abuse
3. Not allowed to think, question or challenge leadership
4. Jesus has left the building and the people inside of it don't resemble Him in the least bit
5. The Holy Spirit has left the building and doesn't show up Sunday mornings.(If He did, these discussions

wouldn't exist – people would knock the doors down to meet with God)

6. Man-made traditions (which Jesus spoke against – and in the OT as well)

7. Jesus said money is for the poor – not pastor's vacations and houses that make most of the flock look like slumdogs, and expensive buildings and programs

8. Prayer has been all but removed from the building and life of the 'church'

9. It's a country club – let's be honest about how many of our churches are G-rated Christian country clubs.

10. Sunday is their worst day of the week. After church the 'grumpiness' sets in.

11. Time-set and clocked. The real temple that Jesus would attend on the Sabbath was a 'come whenever and we're here'. You would show up when you got there, stay as long as your family was able, and sit, listen, be taught, pick a person to listen to in various areas, pray, give God your tithe, be outside in nature, have discussions with other people, etc. Now it's "be here from 9-11 and don't be late. Oh and bring money. Oh and sit, stand, sing this, don't speak. Come back next week you're on nursery'.

12. Many of the people I know have left church for the above reasons and the most important one: They don't find God or His Spirit inside. They are craving God and His peace and filling. They are deeply in love with God and don't want to waste time lying to others and themselves by participating in an empty service week after week when they could be out meeting with other believers praying, reading Scriptures, communing with God in nature, resting on the Sabbath, visiting the sick and poor and going OUT to the lost. Not using cheap marketing tricks to invite them IN. They leave because they love God and must serve him with honesty and integrity – not because they're lazy. They read Jesus' words and find the church doesn't resemble them or His life in the least.

I left the man-made, business model, institutionalized, nothing-like-Scripture church building to find the real God of the Bible. I've never been more at peace or more in love with Him. I've never had such a deep and consistent prayer life. I've never been so loving towards other people. I've never had such a deep desire to serve others and my community.

I found that when I left church... and found God.

Reply

Tom on August 9, 2015 at 8:42 am

Well said. Wish people would like and reply, because this is the real problem.

Reply

Cathey Chisholm on October 24, 2015 at 8:40 pm

How do you deal with the fact that Jesus calls the Church "His Bride?" And we are commanded not to give up on assembling together?

Reply

notniceslims on February 28, 2016 at 3:06 pm

aThat's where we often miss it.

Jesus, in no way, ever referred to "Organized Christianity" as His Bride and neither did He ever widen His Arms to include our understanding and philosophy of 'Christendom' in His embrace. Check Revelations 3 well.

Secondly, when Jesus said "...on this Rock I will build my Church", He never was referring to any institution or person other than the revelation of Himself by the Holy Spirit to every believer.

We are not to forsake the meetings of ourselves together per time BUT legalistically putting people under guilt-trips on the basis that attending meeting days is solely responsible for spiritual growth is simply preaching the Word of God out of context.

In fact, there ought to be room enough to allow people to go digest whatever spiritually nourishment they might have ingested in church from time to time instead of having people compulsively come in week after week 'hearing much but growing little'.

Having no desire for attending any meetings whatsoever without any rational or higher cause, on the other hand, might be a sign that a soul was still in need of Christ's saving grace or healing touch.

Reply



Danielle Ogilvie Rodda on July 1, 2015 at 7:22 pm

Many of us are less satisfied with the "sermon on Sunday model" of discipleship and spiritual formation. We seek community where relationships are open and there is a safe place for discussion and inter-dependent learning. While there are some churches where this shift is occurring (usually with small group format), many middle-class, 40yrs + majority, pre-dominantly white evangelical churches still clings to the top down approach (Sermon on Sunday model)

Reply

Ken Dillingham, Jr. on July 3, 2015 at 1:59 pm

Danielle,

As a pastor I'm interested in hearing what you mean by the "sermon on Sunday model." Are you saying that you (and people who would identify with your comments) are less inclined to want to have a spiritual leader your life when you refer to the "top down approach"? Or that you don't find the sermons stimulating? Or is this something related to #7, perhaps a group version of "self-directed" spirituality. I definitely want the people in our church to feel that they have a sense of community but I'm not sure that we can circumnavigate the revelation of Ephesians 4:11-13 wherein Paul explains that God has given the ministry for the "full maturing" of the saints. Or are you simply suggesting that going to church on Sunday with no real fellowship and sense of connectivity is neither stimulating or fulfilling?

Sincerely,

KGD

Reply



Danielle Ogilvie Rodda on July 3, 2015 at 7:57 pm

Thanks Ken for seeking clarification. I can hear sincerity and gentleness in your tone. I pray that I communicate in that same spirit.

I'm speaking of the idea that many of us seek community first where learning and teaching is more organic and grassroots. It would probably look more like a small/cell group model/discipleship where discussion and mutual study and prayer occur. This doesn't mean

rejecting the idea of having a spiritual leader. It might include not having a paid Pastor. While I wouldn't call it self-directed (as I understood Carey's description- but it might be headed in that direction), I would call it self-managed and interactive. One might compare it to education decisions of school vs home learning. If one chooses school then one chooses the curriculum and objectives that the ministry of education has deemed appropriate for this age group or level- you show up and you learn what you are supposed to learn in grade 7. In home learning (the opportunity can easily be afforded), the child works at his/her pace, skill level and interest areas. Sermon-on-Sunday model is in all essence an hour long lecture. Pedagogues would agree that it is a far from ideal learning environment.

I think the crux is that we long to be in a place (whether it includes sermon on Sunday or not) where we can expect the people who show up to be authentic and in doing so, it would be a safe place. We want to be the church, not go to church.

This is not only a reflection of what would better for me (and my people)- but it speaks to how the model of a pastor-top-down approach is problematic: the high and often damaging demands placed on one person and his/her family, the inability (because we hold him to such a high standard) to be flawed or be in an actual struggle and not fear for his job. This creates a tendency to insulate and seek power. I know that those (most) called to the ministry are not power-seeking ego-maniacs when they start, nor do they have the desire to become so. I think the pressure cooker environment we parachute them into often creates such problems.

I think there are times when church feels more like a business than a community or large family. (I know Carey asked not make this a post about "all that is wrong with the church")

I hope that clarifies my point. The more I think about it- I think you got it: authentic fellowship/connection required but not optional. Now here's the catch: ya gotta show up to get connected.

Reply

IXQUS (<http://ixqus.com/>) on July 4, 2015 at 1:23 pm

Your words echo loudly, with me. Teaching isn't something that happens over an hour, a day, or a week. It's something that happens with time, experience, reflection, and even humility; not something that is quantized easily, but just like any understanding, requires a process that almost always has points of reference. And greatest of all is having the inspiration to learn.

A strong family model mirrors what a most correct Church, the Body of Christ, was built upon. That's because it adheres to the principles and doctrines of its Scriptures, and roots out corruption where it tries to exist within. When the Body hears the Spirit, which is a gift given very freely and abundantly, there is a change that is unable to veil itself from the world, everyone can notice that change.

People, having the Spirit with them, they are joyful—and it is shared, not simply that proceeds forth from a brittle throne of judgment, where people hear sermons that speak at them, but in all other aspects of their lives, would care nothing about the wellbeing of what they call family.

Perhaps this is a reflection of the times: families must weave through unexplored mountains, just to find greener pasture. That is, there is much more that elders in Christ must teach the younger generation, but the world expects that it must have its say upon how offspring mature, intellectually. And if we simply let them go, without first teaching them about asking God that we could have His Armor to sheath our families—we are just as responsible for how they turn out, and more than even they themselves are. It must be that nobody thinks Scriptures, such as Ezekiel 3, pertain to them anymore. Yet, failing to

place guidance where it is necessary, makes it a shared responsibility. The one thing that has certainly changed, since all that time ago, is that there are many more reasons, not less, that one should learn about cause and effect, as taught as being given to us as the End from the Beginning.

If one reads the Scripture, it isn't a wealthy man that sits upon a statist's or even a pulpit's throne, that holds keys to the kingdom of God. And when He returns, if one is to believe such things (that belief is a journey only traveled by each of us, alone, ultimately in how we reflect back upon it, say in prayer), the miracles people seek after, they won't be given, not how they expect. This is so much so that maybe nobody would be able to discern between what is good and what is bad.

This failure to discern only happens when we fail to invite the Spirit into our lives. If a Church thinks themselves to have light, but shine it in a self-aggrandizing way, they can have that reward, for it is ephemeral; it is in the darkness. The Light shines forth, without much effort, as it is very much like you speak of.

The Son didn't often teach on a mount, and when He did, it was full of promise. He didn't have a bed to lay his head, even as the most base of life get that. And it was for a purpose that not many people today seem able to fully appreciate, through all the noise:

Being able to live below the noise floor, to know its intricacies, to see what is random isn't always so chaotic.

To see that there is a pattern to all of this, especially when it comes to teaching.

To realize when to be Loud and when to be silent. When to see and hear, and when to hide.

To understand that it isn't our own power, but the Father's power, and His alone that any faith is amplified and found to be sound.

Finally, to hear that our lamps brought us to a gate, after a seemingly endless journey, one which we could not yet see the full glory, then be told, "Have no fear, come nearer to Me." And knowing nothing else, falling to our knees, crying in joy, only to be told arise, and finally gaze upon our God's eyes. That is the promise given, but it isn't very affordable, on an hour a week's wages, especially with all the trappings of the masses, in this day and age.

Reply



Libby Rosengren on July 1, 2015 at 10:40 am

This hits home on so many levels for me! I definitely see many of these things happening at our church. I'm volunteering as the kids director right now and I notice these trends with families: 1 or 2 parent homes, blended families. I see it with the volunteers whether they are single or married (with kids or no). While I'm excited about some of these changes (like less guilt over not attending, that's great!), I'm also a little overwhelmed as a leader and someone who cares for my city. I'm all for trying new things if it works – I just wrestle with how to help people have meaningful experiences WHEN they attend. And what can we do to help people outside of that Sunday morning experience too?

I think it's good for us to wrestle with questions about what is really important and what isn't important – stuff that we maybe need to let go of?

I know we can't cater to ever whim, but we sure can all work together to meet people where they are and allow the Holy Spirit to do his thing to use us in ways we haven't yet thought of.

It seems to me that church attendance these days is a reflection that real life is happening. It helps me as a leader of a specific ministry area in a church realize I need to not get stuck in the church bubble obsessed with Sundays, church events and all the days the church doors are open. But instead be a part of the everyday life of what's going on in my city, community and church community. I don't want to just sit back and shake my head in a pharisaical way at the lack of interest "in the things of God" and realize that living life and bumping

shoulders with people is messy – but a beautiful messy. Maybe if I quite obsessing about the numbers of who's attending and who's not, who's committed and who's not, I might realize all the ways that I can be contributing to the solution of reaching people with God's love, grace and truth!

Reply

Janelynn on June 29, 2015 at 11:25 pm

I only ask that the church start validating and stop forgetting the single population. I'm a regular goer and it's such a place for married people. Singles are forgotten or just appeased. Christianity is the only religion that validates me as a single person and the church should act like it.

Reply

Annette Ard on June 21, 2015 at 4:19 pm

Perhaps uncovering the reasons of those who DO continue to attend weekly would shed light on this issue in a different way.

I would guess that a primary reason of those who are most regular in attendance is that their most important friendships are at church. While the reason for church should not be purely social, it should be the place for building and enjoying godly, intimate friendships for adults, teens, and children. If your closest friends do not attend church and you have no close friends at church, then you will probably stop attending regularly.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on June 22, 2015 at 7:02 am

Interesting...that would be a good study. I would think other factors would get revealed too!

Reply

IXQUS (<http://ixqus.com/>) on June 22, 2015 at 1:21 pm

One thing that's weighed heavily upon my mind, in the last few days, when it comes to stuff like this, is where Jesus says, "Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man." Another thing that's crossed my mind is how many people call each other brothers and sisters, in church, but only meet and greet at church, if ever so briefly. One must wonder what kind of brother or sister wouldn't have each other listed in their phone contacts, or wouldn't know where each other lives (and trust me, there are blood relatives that go through this same issue, don't get me wrong here). That is, what's the point of using such a title for someone, if you don't treat them as such? Good thoughts to pray and ponder, Annette.

Reply

Tom on August 9, 2015 at 8:50 am

I have found that when all one's significant relationships are found in a church community it is a strong disincentive to leave. This often contributes to a pattern of increasing spiritual abuse, since the congregation is captive. When the abuse is too much, and one leaves the church, ALL of those relationships are forfeit, since their entire context was within the walls. This is a painful loneliness that may lead some to renounce the whole concept of church. The potential for loss and renewed loneliness is always there.

Reply

IXQUS (<http://ixqus.com/>) on June 15, 2015 at 2:06 am

Not to be too critical, but these are simply excuses; these are not the answers. It is written that there is a great falling away, before the Shepard would come again for His Flock. It isn't something that happens overnight. It isn't something that happens in a generation. It happens over many, many generations. It's a gradual effect.

People place limits on the Father, insomuch as to read over the Scriptures, failing to truly appreciate the Word. If we are lovers of the Word—we will seek out their deep, interconnected, and profound meanings. We hear it often, people speak of the signs, but surely I say to all here in attendance of this forum—the Day draws near, continually.

Are you ready? Going to a meeting place is void of meaning, if one doesn't find within their true motivations for attending. One might as well stay at home, lounging on the couch, if all their attendance is for is that they would be seen of others, to get a pat on the back, and then return to a generally wicked way. The Body isn't an attaboy system. It is the Church of the Firstborn, who is our High Priest, and who intercedes on our behalf, before the Father.

We'd rather argue about the divinity of our Savior, whether or not He is the Father of Creation, than we would about our own worthiness to be fulfilled with an answer to this question oft asked in recent millennia. Here's what I think: if you'd waste your talents, let your lamps burn dry, deplete your reserves, and ask of others to do the same—stay right where you are. Keep far away from the righteous, because, your deceit is well-known to His Children. And they are under the wings of the One who went before us, and rose again on the third day. If you are prepared to use your talents, even so much as to be a light that shines upon a hill that is bright enough and tall enough for it to be seen by all men—even if you only know of one talent, share it and inspire others, go and do good Works, Godspeed.

Reply

IXQUS (<http://ixqus.com/>) on June 15, 2015 at 2:11 am

Also, I see that some have used the “Church of the Firstborn” as the name of their fellowship. There is one Body, one Head. Not many heads with some kind of quadruple helix all in one. So, in short, I'm not talking about any entity, except the fellowship that truly walks in the footsteps of the One that went before us, dying on the cross, now being risen, ascending to the Father. [James 1:26-27]

Reply

SMC on June 13, 2015 at 1:20 am

I love the church and have switched churches twice in the last 20 or so years, trying to find a church that will deal lovingly and biblically with the issues I've faced throughout my marriage, which have been intensely difficult. I married a man who claimed and still claims belief, but was addicted to pornography behind my back for the first 18 years of marriage, while adamantly lying to me the whole time about what he was involved in. He was deceptive to himself and others and emotionally and spiritually hostile to me much of the time, while giving others in the church a wonderful impression of his 'spiritual maturity.' We also have children, and his sin and deception has deeply impacted and wounded us all. To seek help from pastors and 'counselors' in the church has been traumatizing to me and I have grown very distrustful of the churches and pastors that I've dealt with. (We have sought out help from 4 pastors and 2 different church staff 'counselors' in a total of 4 local churches, and a professional Christian sexual addiction counselor who was pretty helpful, but very, very expensive and we can't afford to keep going for professional help.) I know that there are trustworthy and loving pastors and counselors in the larger church as a whole who have written excellent books and articles and given excellent and Biblical counsel through their writings (I thank God for them every day!!), but as these authors have pointed out in many of their books/writings/ podcasts, etc., MANY women like me have experienced pastors who minimize, ignore, and excuse the horrible and prolific sin of pornography use in the church. Many pastors are not at all equipped or willing to address this plague in the church and have ignored the needs of women who desperately need their support and help and have even blamed women for not being loving enough and being the cause of their husbands' sinful choices, even in situations when the husbands have been using porn since childhood and didn't tell their wives the truth about their problems before marriage!! How can addictions or enslavements that have been well established before marriage be a wife's fault? I'm not saying that wives are not responsible for their own sins, but we are talking about serious addiction and serious long term hidden sin here, that is not at all uncommon in the church. There are wolves in sheep's clothing in the church and let's not forget that fact! Why are so many pastors and fellow believers also so ignorant and dismissive of the deep relational problems and enslavement to sin that require years to work through and much patient and wise help from the body of Christ in coming alongside both spouses in situations like mine?? I have had more than one pastor who has simply suggested that I forgive and that my husband and I should start going on dates or that we learn some communication skills and that's about the extent of their help/advice/support, while my husband has still been enslaved to habitual lying and hostility

towards me. And, when I try to explain this, they view my communication as my lack of forgiveness instead of a plea for help and understanding with the ongoing sin issues! They seem to think that if my husband has confessed, then that's all that is required and there are no more problems to deal with or help needed in the relationship!! I meet with a group of women in similar marriages and many of those precious ladies have stories of pastors who have blown off porn use by husbands, explaining to the women that men just do it to relax and that it's no big deal, really. And, have you seen the statistics of porn use by pastors?? The church needs to wake up and take sin and its terrible consequences much more seriously and help and support wives in this situation instead of blaming them! They also need to take the plight of the women in the porn industry seriously as well, and not keep it all going by consuming and supporting it! Not once did any of the pastors or counselors mention this in their counsel to my husband! For now, I feel absolutely no safety with pastors, but will trust God to use the other women in my life who are drawing together to support each other and seek God in the midst of trying to deal in godly ways with our husbands' sins that local pastors are not really addressing and do not know how to counsel. I have even heard of pastors that church discipline women for their lack of forgiveness, when really the problem is not so much forgiveness as a lack of trust, in light of their husband's lack of real repentance and continuing enslavement to the various and deeply rooted sins that always go along with pornography use, i.e. deception, poor view of women as objects, extreme selfishness, spiritual blindness, etc. So, that would be one reason why churches today are really not always a very safe place for women like me and why it is extremely hard to trust or open up with church leaders or fellow believers, and why women need to be very, very careful and prayerful over who they seek help from in the body of Christ. I am still 'attending' church, but it is not a comfortable thing for me. I cry a lot. I am grateful for those in the larger body who are seriously addressing these issues and for the local women that I meet with. God has been very gracious and faithful to provide those precious ones in the midst of some pretty scary and very tragic experiences with pastors and other 'leaders' that we've encountered. In writing this in the context of the larger body of Christ, would you please pray for me and my husband, and for all of those in the church in similar situations, which according to statistics is a LARGE number of people? And, pray for church leadership to have their eyes opened to the seriousness of the sin of pornography and the resulting blindness that comes when men (and increasingly women, too) shrink their souls in turning to it instead of God for years on end? Thank you.

[Reply](#)

Wynn on June 11, 2015 at 9:41 pm

I love God and the church but I think the church is a man made thing not commanded by God. I recently wrote all the pros of church in one list and cons in another. There were more cons. I have heard so many sermons and read so many scriptures that when I return from church and ask the question, I didn't learn much. I can worship at home and visit the people on my own and get more out of it . Just sayen.... So I don't go to church as often because I feel it's a waste of time and have heard this from others.

[Reply](#)

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on June 12, 2015 at 6:42 am

Wynn...you are not alone in feeling that way. But I want to encourage you to search scripture. You'll see the church was Jesus' idea, not ours. In fact, you wouldn't be a Christian if it wasn't for the church.

[Reply](#)

Wynn on June 12, 2015 at 12:03 pm

What is the scripture. I know the assembling of yourselves together but that isn't a church building per say that takes thousands of dollars a year to function. There's a church on each corner. Somehow I don't think Christ would approve. My mother led me to Christ not a church. She had an old Guideon bible and it had nothing to do with a church. I am referring to the building not the people.

Reply

IXQUS (<http://ixqus.com/>) on June 20, 2015 at 5:30 am

The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.

The Christ comes to minister to those that are in need of healing. When He forced man to think, He was killed for it. In His righteousness, He was risen, on the Third Day. When He arose, He didn't take down the houses of worship. Rather, He admonished those that would follow Him, "Feed my Sheep. Feed my Sheep. Feed my Sheep." The commandments, the new Covenants, they could not be more clear, anymore plainly spoken: Love God and each other, as you have unending love for yourself. There isn't a limit to where one could minister to others. Especially with the Great Cloud, the Internet. So, if you, in your heart, feel you should reach others, on each corner, go and do Good Works. If you feel compelled to build a chapel, it is likewise that I would admonish you. Go and do Good Works. Faith without Works is dead. The Word, without Works—is dead.

Reply

Julie on June 9, 2015 at 12:33 pm

I've seen, that a main cause for decreased attendance of those who "love church" is just that...they love "church". They are in "love with the idea" of being a christian but are not in love with & sold out exclusively to Christ. If you are attending church because you love church – which has in a sense become an overgrown recreation/activity center – then you have taken church &/or christianity (good things) and made them into idols (obviously, not what God intended). We have to be extremely careful that we are worshipping the Creator not the created. It does not matter whether church is viewed as an institution or as a movement... either places undue value upon itself.

The real question is: "Why do we think church/attendance is an accurate measure of one's dedication to God?" Yes, church attendance could be considered a "fruit" by which we see proof of commitment, but really we have no way to (and no biblical permission to) judge one's relationship with God. We can only be accountable to God for ourselves.

Let's stop emphasizing attendance and start focusing on life transformation! Personally, I would rather see people's lives radically transformed and then see them taking action to participate in discipling others which leads to further transformations outside the church than to see a church be full of "dead souls" because they feel that attending church is some how fulfilling their call to the Great Commission.

The next question is: "What are Committed Christians (whether or not they attend church) DOING to produce "fruit" – evidence to the world – that facilitates life transformations, discipleship, charity, and Godly cultural change?"

Just a thought...

[Reply](#)

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on June 10, 2015 at 7:16 am

Attendance matters for a variety of reasons, but I agree, we need better metrics far beyond attendance. Thanks!

[Reply](#)

lisetteDeBorchgrave on June 1, 2015 at 11:01 am

You're close, but not quite right. The church is, and must be, BOTH institution and movement. It is a challenge to keep both parts in balance. Institution without the spirit of the movement results in a male-style, left-brained organization with popes and bishops and legal courts and Spanish Inquisitions. A movement without the organization inherent in institution results in a herd of cats, free-range hippies and independent gurus. For most of the church's history, the greater danger has been the former. An overly male-dominated institution has too often squelched the spirit of the movement, resulting in the phenomenon you describe: people repulsed and staying away. Fundamentalism (the great heresy of the 20th century) is little more than men's attempts to stifle the movement that was bringing the world a more enlightened and compassionate Christianity and returning to the militaristic model.

[Reply](#)

J Buchanan on May 31, 2015 at 7:42 pm

I love church and the church. I am a church person. When I'm away from home, I attend church. However, I am finding a diminishing desire to attend the church where I am a member for only one reason-terrible preaching. I'm not talking about delivery or length or jokes. I'm talking about confused and confusing doctrine, flat out errant doctrine and an embarrassing lack of biblical understanding. Just FYI.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on June 1, 2015 at 7:54 am

I get that. You're triggering a post in me about consumer Christianity. Thanks for the impetus!

Reply

Craig Morrison on May 30, 2015 at 9:43 am

Thank you Carey and everyone for the discussion. One thing I have noticed is to not over look the fact that just because families/individuals are not at OUR location (church) does not mean they are not engaging in the Church.

Even when families from our local body of believers go to the beach, mountains, ball games, wherever... They usually go to church or connect online to our services...

Growing in our faith and finding community is an on going process and I'm not sure worship attendance (at one particular location) is the best metric to use to gauge if this is happening in a believer's life or not. That's not to say worship attendance is not important, but it maybe happening in more ways than one. Great article!

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on June 1, 2015 at 7:55 am

True. We are a church, not THE church!

Reply

Kerri on May 30, 2015 at 9:33 am

I would say one of the biggest struggles is for people with young families like myself! I have 6,3 and new baby. My kids get sick and I cannot go or I was up with them all night or the nursery will not accommodate until 6 months or older. Or my kids just got healthy and I cannot risk exposing them to more sick kids because that means more time off work during the week which could cost someone their job. I love going to church, but I will say that makes it extremely hard to have good attendance. I know other people in my shoes feel guilty by that and then do not want to go because they feel judged. □

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on May 30, 2015 at 9:59 am

Judgment is terrible...I agree!

Reply



Rita on May 30, 2015 at 7:57 am

Several thoughts come to mind, the committed, are they being challenged intellectually, spiritually and even practically?

In some cases it could very well be they are seeking to fill those voids as committed Christians outside of the church.

The challenge still remains what or how then would the church need to change to increase the level of engagement and attendance for those desiring more? How do you balance ministry areas of worship, serving, giving and discipleship for those at the surface and those desiring to go deeper?

Thank you Carey for the thought provoking and poignant article.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on May 30, 2015 at 9:59 am

Thanks Rita.

Reply

Prissy on June 1, 2015 at 3:12 pm

I try to attend church every Sunday. There are some Sunday's that I don't attend because I am traveling. I do however often visit a church in the city that I travel to. My church is now 28 miles from where I live, but I still make the effort to be there and attend choir rehearsals. The personal relationship one has with Christ is more important than thier attendance.

Reply

robbwebster on May 29, 2015 at 7:01 pm

I would say simple laziness. They claim they are just busy and wanted a day at home.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on May 30, 2015 at 5:47 am

I agree that laziness is a growing issue in North American Christianity.

[Reply](#)**Joe Stroup** on June 3, 2015 at 3:41 pm

Robb and Carey, would you say that they are lazy or exhausted? I'm also curious about the pressing busyness that fills our lives and sucks a lot of vitality out of us and attending a worship service becoming another thing to do on the day we are called to rest in the Lord. I don't disagree that laziness is a problem in western culture as a whole, but there also seems to be a crushing amount of stuff demanding our attention and time and we are not great at really taking time to pause and attending church can often not provide that sense of restfulness that Sabbath is supposed to be. As a parent of a young kid, getting to church in the first place is really exhausting so there may be a desire to find that rest alongside a realization that this activity isn't going to fulfill that need. Just my two cents.

[Reply](#)**Carey Nieuwhof** (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on June 3, 2015 at 7:01 pm

Thanks Joe. Young family is hard for sure. And yet I think over the centuries Christians loved to gather. It wasn't an obligation, it was an opportunity...a priority. The early church gathered daily, before work. I think ideally, the church is an opportunity, not an obligation. Maybe the rest of our lives are too busy.

Reply

**Joe Stroup** on June 4, 2015 at 10:30 am

Oh, I absolutely agree. We've let far too much creep in and the wide variety of options leaves us spread far too thin amongst the potential good things we can be plugged in to. The value of the church coming together for support and encouragement in daily life is something I long for, but I don't see happening. With the worship service structure (since we are talking specifically about church attendance) the way it looks right now, does it create a place for that encouragement and refreshing? Is that also part of why it's easy for people to say no or miss a week?

I appreciate this dialogue because I want to help the church take ownership of their community and have real buy-in to the congregation they call home, but I sometimes wonder if the structure we've developed is a hindrance to that happening as our lives become more and more demanded upon.

Longing for Fellowship on August 18, 2017 at 6:33 pm

What a smug, blanket statement to make. Sure there are lazy people, and that may be why they miss church. But to think that's why all people don't go to church on a regular basis

is a cop-out. I went to every church service, three times a week then twice a week once they stopped one of the service times. I went to extra services when there was a guest speaker. I attended the ladies fellowship meetings. I once thought every person that didn't show up on Sundays was a rebel, a troublemaker or too lazy to show up. That was when I was a fairly new Christian. I never thought I would be in the situation I was in just 2 or 3 years later, when my pastor, whom I still love and respect, starting verbally abusing me every chance he had, from the pulpit. Believe me, others close to me noticed it too and it was not my imagination. He refused to admit there was a problem and I got tired of being bashed and shamed every other Sunday so after thinking hard about it and feeling a release to go, I did. I miss my church friends but I because I didn't talk about it with all of them, most have no idea why I went, I just went quietly. They may have noticed the abuse themselves, but don't fully realize how it was affecting me. I felt like a battered wife, except that my husband is a good man. I was battered in the church, not my home. But I still love God, love people, love that church and the pastor. I pray, read the word and still would love to find a good church in my small town. But I know from experience it's very hard to find fellowship when you're wanting to start over. Most of the people in the church already have their own friends and I felt like an outsider when I tried again.

Reply

Darciann Post Samples on May 28, 2015 at 9:39 pm

Here's an add...mean people, church cliques, insincerity, hypocrisy. We have moved several times due to life changes. Even churches who focus on being welcoming have generally assigned a small group as welcomers and the rest go on with their normal activities.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on May 30, 2015 at 5:48 am

Mean people...stink.

Reply

RLR on May 28, 2015 at 8:08 pm

Here's what baffles me. In the church I serve, the affluent who frequently travel (the world!) are always so apologetic about their absence. One of the most committed couples in the church who traveled with us on a mission to build a school in Africa (engagement!) support the church with passion...when they're home, which is about half the time. They're great Christians and love the church...so please stop telling me how sorry you are that you're going to be gone again for 4 consecutive weeks! (Sorry for the rant.)

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on May 30, 2015 at 5:48 am

One of the questions we're wrestling down is how we can go with people when they can't be with us (social media, online etc).

Reply

Adam on May 28, 2015 at 9:18 am

As a church-planting family in Cleveland, I can say this article is right on. Our most committed, engaged people attend/participate once or twice a month. This is especially true when working among people who have zero church experience. They value faith community, they are impacted by the ministry, but they have so little time.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on May 30, 2015 at 5:47 am

Love that you've planted in Cleveland Adam.

Reply

Lisa Horner Sepelak on May 28, 2015 at 9:10 am

One thing to add....work schedules. I work night shift at a hospital and work every Sunday, Monday Tuesday night, since working has shifted to this schedule I don't get to church as often. Rely more on things you mention, self learning, pod cast, etc...

[Reply](#)

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on May 29, 2015 at 6:50 am

I should have made this post 11 Reasons....you're right. Work is huge!

[Reply](#)

matthew hooper on June 19, 2015 at 7:37 am

Carey is there any research on the relation between shift work and church attendance? I'm trying to address this issue in a research paper and from what I can see no one has researched the issue but many like yourself are starting to observe this.

[Reply](#)

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on June 19, 2015 at 8:23 am

Not that I've seen but I'm sure it's out there. And yes, that has to be a factor!

[Reply](#)

Tarnya Burge on April 12, 2016 at 5:01 pm

And aren't more women working more hours as well. I think that is a significant factor. " As of 2008, close to 80 percent of mothers with children between ages 6 and 17 worked outside the home. That is a rise of about 10 percent since 1984." For me it feels like the tide just broke. I used to go every week, now it just seems too hard. Not only that I do evaluate the value of the 2 hours. Honestly, I think there needs to be a shift to the importance of small groups and fellowship. Praying for one another, helping one another in our walk, deeper and smaller.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on April 12, 2016 at 5:40 pm

For sure that's an issue Tarnya. I can empathize. I think for adults it's so important to have community, and for kids too.

Reply

Abel Dumaup on May 29, 2015 at 10:08 am

I agree. I'm a health care professional as well, working night shifts and every other weekend.

Reply

mikesensei on May 27, 2015 at 5:47 pm

One question I keep asking about this is, "What have we as a church done to foster the attitude that regular time with God and His people is negotiable or optional for a believer?" I can't help but think that with the rise of seeker-sensitive church models and churches adopting a widespread consumer-driven Burger King mindset ("Have it your way!") has in large part led to this. We shouldn't be surprised that regular church attendance is not a priority for many families nowadays because when the message they hear from church leaders is, "Come as you are!", "Church on YOUR schedule!", "Worship God when you get around to it!", we have trained them to think this way.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on May 28, 2015 at 6:07 am

There's a difference between seeing our relationship with God as a duty and seeing it as an opportunity motivated by gratitude. Please don't make the simplistic characterization of attractional church as Burger King. The truth is, those churches are reaching far more people than most and have many sincere Christians in them. I know many churches that see God as 'duty' who actually reach few but look down on everyone who doesn't attend. I'm sure that's not where you're coming from but I've seen it too often to leave it unremarked.

Reply

Greg Kittredge on August 27, 2015 at 10:10 am

I'm a pastor and tend to agree with Mike's analysis. I believe we have dumbed down our ecclesiology. I must take some issue with the idea of church as merely an opportunity motivated by gratitude without any underlying sense of obligation whatsoever. We serve God (and His Church) both because we love Him and we demonstrate our love for God by serving Him.

The Church is the Body of Christ- i.e. a living organism where each part grows and functions most fully in relationship with all the other parts. To the extent that attendance and relationship are correlated, then regular attendance is vital. Beyond that, can one claim to be committed to the Head but not be committed to the Body? As a pastor I have concluded that most of the reasons people drop out of church or go to another church are the very reasons that they should have stayed where they were. When people feel that church attendance is merely an opportunity and not an obligation, they have less incentive to stay planted when they become dissatisfied in some way. My ecclesiology informs me that when I am born again I am joined not only to Christ but to His Body, the Church. Yes, "Church" in the universal, invisible sense, but also in the local, visible sense. If we are intended to reach our full potential as disciples of Jesus only in the context of the "iron sharpens iron" relationships we experience with other believers, that has to happen through real committed relationships within a local church body.

With regard to attractional approaches, I think it can be a slippery slope. First, the Great Commission tells us to "Go", not to "Attract." Secondly, I believe there is an important difference between "not repelling" people vs. "attracting" them to church. I do believe churches are often guilty of turning off prospective people by an unwillingness to change ways of "doing church", holding on to irrelevant or "sacred" traditions, justifying shabby facilities, requiring a dress code, ineffective preaching styles, an ingrown cliquishness, etc, etc, etc. However, it's one thing to remove these barriers to reaching new people, and another to deliberately set out to become attractive to them. One main danger is that we may become so good at merely attracting people that we fail to call them to become devoted self-denying disciples of Jesus. As the "Good News" the Gospel is inherently attractive and the Jesus of the Bible is an extremely attractive person.

Thirdly, authentic church growth is something only the Lord can bring about. Our part is to “plant” and to “water”, but only God can make it grow. Like a farmer, all we can do is create an environment for growth. I tend to agree that the better question is not, “How can I get my church to grow?” but, “What is keeping my church from growing?”

Reply

Rosemary on May 26, 2015 at 3:40 pm

Rosemary

I thank God for this forum its an eye opener. As a Pastor I was encouraged by people 's views and feelings. Hope as leaders we will correct our own mistakes. But church is not only for leaders, a leader is also a member people should not stop coming to church because they are not pleased before they raise their issue. An error can be done out of ignorance.

Reply

Iori on May 26, 2015 at 12:15 pm

Thanks for this post, Carey. This is a subject we have been wrestling with in our community. We live in a resort town where many people work weekends – that’s life. In addition to all the great points you made, we find that many (ourselves included) have so much to do outside after an increasingly long winter season that the

thought of sitting inside on a beautiful day is really not all that appealing. To be sure, having lots of very traditional churches full of retirees, doesn't help. As we look at ways to reach the families and the unchurched in our community, I believe we will need to break out of the Sunday morning mould.

Reply

Rob Sharpe on May 26, 2015 at 6:30 am

Thanks for posting this! This is a great list and a wake up call for sure... I would add 2 others to the list from my own experience.

#1 The number one thing that I'm encountering right now is work obligations. More people than ever are working on Sundays. There are a number of even board members in my church whose work expectations are through the roof and they simply can't make it but for a handful of days.

#2 Disgruntled and hurt church people. This is pervasive in our culture. People who were once active and contributing church members who in some event or other were hurt or mistreated or... didn't get their own way... so they walk. They love the church/God but can't bring themselves to attend regularly. Even after sitting down and have coffee with them to try to help them heal and talking things out at the end of the day for them church = pain.

Reply

Heatheray on May 27, 2015 at 7:28 pm

These would be the number 1 and 2 reasons why my family don't attend frequently. #3 would be sports. Three generations, 3 reasons. My parents, hurt; my siblings and I-work, my niece, sports.

Reply

Debbie Speice on May 28, 2015 at 4:54 pm

I cand

Reply

Carole Webb on May 29, 2015 at 11:58 am

Perhaps we should offer church at different times? I know there are reasons it is Sunday, but this is not going to sway those who work on Sunday, they have their children on Sundays, they travel on Sundays.....

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on May 29, 2015 at 5:14 pm

Great idea in theory, but I don't know too many churches that have had massive success with this. Anything off Sunday brings greatly diminishing results. People simply want to attend Sunday or not at all. Weird.

Tina on May 22, 2015 at 4:42 pm

Thanks for posting this article, it resonated greatly with me because as I have grown older I have definitely started going to church less frequently. I am sure that other people have commented along these lines, but I could not make it through all 400+ comments. I find it much easier to attend my small group regularly than attend my church. The big reason is that in my small group I will be seen and heard. When I go to church, I am lucky if I see one or two people that I know. I have joined service teams to attempt to get to know people, but for the most part, I find that with people rotating so frequently, it is hard for relationships to develop. Church attendance often becomes an exercise in loneliness. I go in hopes of human contact and fellowship, and sometimes leave without saying hello to anyone. I realize on some level, I can challenge myself to be the person who reaches out, but I must confess this is not always easy. This is a church I went to for 5 years. They have had once a month 'newcomer lunches', and welcome teams. But there was still an air of insider vs outsider, and it is hard to figure out how to break into the 'inner circle'. I think lack of community is one of the bigger issues facing large churches. I grew up in a small community church of 150 people. We had coffee after church in the fellowship hall on Sundays, and Summer potlucks. People made time for each other. I wish that more church leaders would move away from a production and program mentality and look for the simple things that promote community and connection.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on May 23, 2015 at 3:41 am

Tina...thanks for this and for hanging onto a faith community, even if it's largely your small group. I think you speak for a growing number of people who are looking for smaller gathers.

Tomorrow we open our brand new facility. We spent almost 3 million dollars on it. It seats 350. It's a central facility for all we'll do in the future. People think it's too small (and it is), but we'll run multiple services from day one and simply launch other locations when we out grow it. More smaller venues > one large venue in the future. I hope that might help people like you who get lost in a big crowd.

Reply

Kathy on May 28, 2015 at 10:31 am

Your comment "Church attendance often becomes an exercise in loneliness" made my heart hurt, but resonated with me. We talk about reaching out all the time, but this continues to be a huge issue of not connecting with folks that sit in the pews. Thank you for this great post!

Reply

pastord on May 20, 2015 at 10:05 am

This is a great article. I wonder if the people that "love" the church, are in love with what the church is doing? If so my concern is the people that love the church, are they in love in what "their church" is doing as an instruction or in love with the body of Christ? I've been asking the question "Are we showing the (value) of serving Jesus?"

[Reply](#)

shredded deltoids on May 16, 2015 at 10:47 pm

If we define the term “church” as the folks who have faith in Christ, then I do love the church. I attempted institutional church attendance about three years ago after not attending for a few years. My experiences were awful. I find quite a gap in the attitudes of institutional church attenders from what loving Christians should be. Churchians readily find fault with others for the purpose of feeling morally superior. Lead pastors use manipulation and are frequently dishonest with their real goal being to fill the pews and rake in more cash. People chosen for ministry leaders are not chosen for their competence, but chosen due to kissing up to the lead pastor. Elders do not elder, but instead befriend the lead pastor and even cover for his manipulations.

No more institutional church for me. I will live out my faith in Christ by telling others of my faith when the opportunity presents, which will include warning them about institutional churches. I will not give another penny to an institutional church, but give to charities such as Compassion, or the homeless dude on the street.

These professional elite pastors need to take to heart the reality of Jesus Christ. He is the real leader of us believers. He will judge us all. Hopefully His blood will cover all of our personal sins as well as our collective sins.

[Reply](#)

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on May 18, 2015 at 8:32 am

Whoa, that's a sad story, and bit cynical in my view. Please don't fall in the trap of paining all leaders with the same brush. I'm sorry your experience was terrible. And thank you for living out your faith. But you're stronger in community than you are alone.

Reply

anebt on May 16, 2015 at 5:48 pm

My mother told me that generally churches in the 40s through 60s were more engaged in serving the community than with preaching sermons and filling pews. The churches ran shelters for the poor, homes for victims of domestic violence, and some churches provided children with affordable schooling. Most churches today are disengaged from the needs of the community. Maybe the welfare state has made us Christians too unwilling to engage ourselves with community needs.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on May 18, 2015 at 8:31 am

Many churches are reclaiming these initiatives. That's awesome in my view.

Reply

Nova on May 9, 2015 at 10:42 pm

I confess great disappointment in this article. The biggest reason for attendance is this article itself. Most of the reasons cited are external. Referencing (or blaming) external elements instead of a self-examination by the very churches that are experiencing the drop in parishioners. It's the "it's not me, it's you" approach. Mo's comments below were spot on. The lack of depth and personal relationships have me finding the companionship of Christ in others elsewhere 3 Sundays out of 4.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on May 10, 2015 at 8:42 pm

This article isn't justifying, it's explaining. It's not condoning, just saying 'this is what's happening.' And I'm pretty sure....this is what's happening.

Reply

Jack Robertson on May 3, 2015 at 10:10 am

I agree with many of your points. Because of a divorce, I have been away from my home "church" for awhile. My faith in Jesus has not diminished but my faith in Christians has. I have mingled more with the unchurched crowd and the reason they keep repeated why they are not in church is the hypocrisy of the church. I experience that from my home church. Those same people will say they see more Christ like acts from people who don't shout.."I am a Christian". I am reminded of the quote from Gandhi, "I like your Christ, it is your Christians I don't like. They are so unlike your Christ."

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on May 4, 2015 at 5:20 am

Sorry you've experienced such judgment Jack. I hope and pray you find a community where you experience both grace and truth.

Reply

John McWilliam on May 3, 2015 at 9:11 am

#6 – rings true for me. In our 20's & 30's we just felt we had to be at church every week, rain or shine with all of our kids. Now as 50+ empty nesters, we are finding it as equally enjoyable and mutually spiritual just to spend a day or two away spending time together doing the stuff we never had a chance to before. We live in an age where spare time is such a rare commodity.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on May 4, 2015 at 5:17 am

I think that's likely true. Our nest is sometimes empty now too, but the question I have is "How are we contributing to the Kingdom?" Serving and inviting friends into a relationship with Jesus remain key objectives in our lives. Church helps tremendously with that.

Reply

Lindsay on May 1, 2015 at 9:20 am

One reason I think churches, specifically megachurches, are on the plateau/decline is because many pastors, in a valiant attempt to reach people far from God, have stripped their messages of all depth. Long-time attenders still believe in the message, but they are no longer learning from it so it doesn't feel like a priority anymore.

Also with a continual trend of big-church leadership pushing church growth, brand, and vision, the gospel can begin to feel manipulated to fit the vision, rules, and method of the church. Church slogans slowly start to overtake Biblical truths. This makes it feel more like a corporate business than a ministry. Long term, corporate churches won't get commitment, they'll get consumers. To get real-deal, long-term commitment you need community at the heart of the church.

I say all this not as a critic, but as a fully committed (50/52) 8-year member of a megachurch who believes in its mission but is also very aware of its pitfalls.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on May 4, 2015 at 5:20 am

Thanks for your balance. For sure, there are pitfalls, but being clear doesn't automatically mean you're being shallow. I think the key is 'fruit'. Is your church producing disciples who look more like Jesus 3-5 years into the journey than they did before? If the answer is yes, thank God!

Reply

Robbie McAlister on April 29, 2015 at 12:19 pm

I totally agree with your post and have seen the same things in our community way down south.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on May 4, 2015 at 5:18 am

It seems to be a universal trend.

Reply

Carrie Smith on April 22, 2015 at 3:39 pm

I have some friends who understand the good church can do, but haven't made a relational connection with anyone in churches local to them. There is a desire, but sometimes a lack of intentionality. They have gotten used to Sundays being a day off, the only time with family or in some cases, their work "weekend" doesn't include Sunday so they can't attend. I agree with you that engagement is a much better focus than attendance – especially if we can embrace the movement of church versus the institution of church.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on April 23, 2015 at 6:25 am

That's exactly it Carrie. Engagement and church as a movement. Love it.

[Reply](#)

tw on April 9, 2015 at 9:27 am

We fall under this especially with #2. My husband could never play sports since they were on Sunday. He ended up despising going to church then. He knows it is important and has worked through the feelings over the years. What we do with our kids is attend many churches instead of one. The churches that are changing with Saturday night services see us alot. But since we are traveling to different areas it could be we go to four different churches in a month. We are grateful for those that serve on Saturdays, or even Sunday afternoons so my kids see that church is important, but you can still play the sport you love.

[Reply](#)

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on April 9, 2015 at 2:04 pm

Man, that's such a tough call as a parent, isn't it? You think you're doing the right thing by putting church first, but it can trigger the opposite effect. On the other hand, I've seen parents do the opposite (put sports first) and kids grow up knowing nothing about God. Glad your husband worked through his resentment. Glad you're finding flexible churches!

[Reply](#)

Deborah Wiggin Snyder on April 8, 2015 at 7:17 pm

I come from a family where we attended 3 or more church services every week from the time we were brought home from the hospital as infants. My dad was a pastor and Christian school teacher/Bible college professor and my husband was also a Christian school teacher for many years. I would love to attend church on a regular basis but it seems that we live in a community where church is (as someone else mentioned) a social function. If you don't fit a certain demographic, if your kids don't go to the right schools, if you have kids with medical issues, if you have financial issues, you are considered a burden. The last church we attended claimed we were a burden on them and needed too much help. Do they expect me to put my kids up for adoption because they have medical issues that require a huge ongoing financial burden? It got to the point where I felt that my attending church was a stumbling block to others who were there so it is better for me to just stay home with my special needs children.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on April 8, 2015 at 7:25 pm

Deborah...thanks for sharing your story. Heartbreaking in many ways. Thank you for trying. I hope and pray your kids grow up to know the love of Christ, not the judgment of the church.

Reply

Kimo on April 8, 2015 at 3:54 pm

I also sense people are becoming fearful. Increasingly in America, knowing that someone goes to church on Sunday (especially to a traditional Bible-believing church), could mean that you don't get that job or aren't promoted, or you get targeted for your faith at work. This won't affect the committed believer, but for many of

those who just see church as a social function, or once believed it was the respectable thing to do, are not coming any more.

Many churches are also now divided over the issues of homosexuality and same-sex marriage, and that is an easy invitation for people (whatever they might believe) to simply walk out the door because they don't want their Sundays consumed by those arguments.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on April 8, 2015 at 4:07 pm

Good points Kimo. Thank you!

Reply

Brian Johnson on April 8, 2015 at 11:41 am

"What would you add?" – False theology, apostasy, the natural tendency of man to drift AWAY from God and all things godly... This is not some "trend" that a little tweaking of the business model will cure. This is man's natural drift. Churches that preach the truth are going to get smaller and smaller and smaller – that is a fact of Christianity. We are described as a remnant, not the majority.

I look around me and more and more Christians are: Tolerating adultery and the ensuing divorce with little more care than a shrug of the shoulders, living together before marriage (or skipping marriage), using obscene language, skipping church, etc. It is the sad downward spiral of all cultures and it sucks in Christians,

too. Consider that the world will be at its worst when Christ returns, and true Christianity will be such a small demographic that Jesus even wondered aloud, "When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith in the earth?"

Reply

jeff cherniss on April 8, 2015 at 3:32 pm

Gee, Brian, I daresay that most growing churches preach Christ and Him crucified. I disagree with the statement, "Churches that preach the truth are going to get smaller..." that belies the fact of the decline of mainline congregations shrinking like showmen in April as they abandon orthodoxy, and successful churches preaching Grace and Truth.

Reply

Brian Johnson on April 8, 2015 at 4:00 pm

I look around and I see GOOD churches that actually stand on the Truth (i.e. NOT "emergent", "post-modern", trendy, etc.) and refuse to waver on it getting smaller. More and more people do not want absolute truth, even the religious among us. They want something feel-good, they have "itching ears" and they go looking for the speaker who will tickle them. It is a prophesied sign of the end of this age.

I will not declare that EVERY church that has rising attendance is preaching comfortable falsehoods, but if I were a betting man and placed bets on every church in America that was growing larger, I would end up with a profit by the end of the list. The Bible warns this will happen, and it is happening.

[Reply](#)

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on April 8, 2015 at 4:07 pm

Brian appreciate that you have a strong opinion, but I think if you got behind the scenes of more ministries you'd be amazed at how authentic they are, not how apostate they are.

[Reply](#)

MO on April 8, 2015 at 11:19 am

I am late to getting this article, so bear with me if my thoughts have already been said.

Background: raised in a Christian family, attended private "Christian" school, regular attender of church for 44 years, accepted Christ at age 9.

I believe that the way we (US Christians) have structured church is not biblical. It could be that the trend of people attending church less often is the natural consequence to a church model needs to be completely revamped.

When I read the narratives of early church life, I don't see any mention of thousands of dollars of tithes being collected to main 5,000 seat arenas that are used once a week. I don't see any reference to debates over music styles. As far as I know, none of those called to lead the church were drawing six-figure salaries and receiving benefit packages that vaulted them into the upper-eschelon of affluence.

Today, when I attend church, the relationships I have are mostly superficial, because I only have about ten minutes of actual fellowship between corporate services. Everyone is too busy to meet for fellowship outside of church. I rarely volunteer for any ministry at the church because I have learned that once you do, it is nearly impossible to resign or quit without seriously offending the church staff, who are always operating at a volunteer shortage.

In my work, I have adopted a policy of thinking twice before doing business with someone from the church. Unfortunately, church people are the ones who have caused the most trouble for my business, including failure to pay for services.

So – what do I think the solution is? Abandon denominational meeting places and return to the roots of our heritage as Christians, before the days of corporate religion.

In the early church, those who gathered for fellowship and worship did so at somebody's home and typically already knew them as a neighbor, relative, or coworker. I doubt there was much financial pressure put on the attenders to give, because there was no building or superstructure to maintain. Those who did give gave out of the love in their hearts, knowing that probably all the money was going to the intended cause. People got to know each other – genuinely – because they saw each other each day.

I think it starts with relationships – cultivating the fertile ground that is all around us in the form of family, neighbors and close friends. Slow down, simplify, and watch as God blesses the fruits of our efforts.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on April 8, 2015 at 4:06 pm

I agree that relationship are critical. I also think that churches in many many forms are making a huge impact. Be careful not to judge too harshly.

Reply

Anonymous on September 19, 2017 at 12:33 pm

If these churches are making such a huge impact then why the debate?! You have just raised the concern that attendance is in decline despite all these efforts. I agree with Brian, Mo and Keymooney – the fault is to be found with the so-called leadership. Too many bad shepherds with compromising beliefs or unbiblical motives encouraging those with itching ears! This is not merely our opinion but a very real warning from Christ in Scripture concerning the end times. Christ judges them very harshly.

Reply

Keymooney on April 17, 2015 at 2:25 pm

MO — I am blown away at the way you have articulated what is happening these days. You have hit the nail on the head. Institutionalists keep trying to tinker with their manmade invention, and it's leading people down a road to destruction. The "church" is not a building or an institution!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! It is what you described — God's called out ones! I will continue to sound the same trumpet that you are sounding — WAKE UP, America and Western Civilization!! I am convinced that institutional "leaders" who continue to defend institutionalism have hardened their hearts — I am convinced that most of them KNOW that trying to make a living as an institutional "Pastor" is not only NOT biblical but is leading people ASTRAY. Many of these people don't actually care about building God's kingdom; they are more interested in maintaining a JOB that is

cushy and pays VERY well, in most cases (or eventually will by being patient). And by the way — your comments are honest and accurate. You have not written anything that is judging too harshly. I thank God for people like you who are willing to obey God and speak the truth.

Reply

MO on May 2, 2015 at 10:47 am

Keymooney – Thanks for your comments. I have read some of your other posts and it seems that you and I have a likemindedness when it comes to the modern church. Keep up the good fight.

Reply

Keymooney on October 21, 2015 at 2:16 pm

Mo — I just re-read your post after several months, and as far as I'm concerned it is from Holy Spirit. Thanks for the encouragement. God continues to do his work in and through me (outside of any institution) as I gladly invest in the lives of others who want to live as Jesus' disciples. Hallelujah!

Reply

Ryan Post on May 20, 2015 at 9:39 am

I left a job where I made double what I do now because I believed in the mission of the "Church." I believe to categorize all pastors as people who want a well paying easy job might be a bit misled. I had to leave my daughters tball game this week because there was an emergency with a church family. So to roughly sum it up I got to my office a 7:30 AM didnt take a lunch took an hour to go to my daughters tball game then drove an hour to the hospital. Met with the family had prayer and got back home around 10:30 PM. Yeah my 40 a week job was way easier and way better paying. Until you try vocational ministry I would recommend that you are careful of the condemnation that you pass. I am sure there are pastors who take advantage of there congregations but to say it is the norm would probably be a stretch. By the way, I also work a second job to make ends meet because following the call of God was important to me. Please find a church led by a Godly man. Stand assured that Jesus will judge these men that take advantage of His church. Until that day let us strive to be the best followers of Jesus. Reaching people for His glory and raising them up

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on May 20, 2015 at 10:17 am

Ryan...one of my favourite comments of all time. Way to go!!! I hope everyone reads your comment! I love the choice you've made for the kingdom!

Reply

Keymooney on October 21, 2015 at 2:10 pm

Ryan — please re-read my post. I have no interest or intent in condemning anyone. I wrote what I did to wake up anyone who hasn't thought through this issue.

You stated that I categorized "all" pastors as wanting a well-paying, easy job; I stated no such thing. What I stated was that MANY of these people work as "pastors" because it is easy and cushy. Incidentally, I AM able to speak from personal experience as in the past I have "worked" as an institutional "pastor" as my occupation for several years, and that is why I am able to state that so many of these "pastors" live an easy and cushy life. Salaries, schedules, and lifestyles of dozens of fellow "professionals" were shared with me and observed by me. Your personal example of leaving your daughter's ball game to care for others in need is not to be downplayed; God knows the sacrifices you make for his purposes. Is it possible, though, that you have left unstated the freedom that you have with your schedule much of the time? Many of us cannot even attend our child's ball game most of the time because we are obligated to our jobs. Having watched dozens of "pastors" live out this lifestyle of freedom with their schedules, it would be difficult to deny that many of these institutional leaders do what is necessary to remain in these jobs to retain this freedom and the high salaries that often go with those positions. I might add that I did the opposite of what you did; I left a "pastor" job with a high salary to work a job paying much less so that I could make disciples of Jesus without the control that was placed on me by the institutional "leaders." It was a painful leaving, but it resulted in my time, energy, and resources being invested in people instead of programs. It is with great joy that I report that many came to know Christ, many became Jesus' disciples, and many know him deeper because of my decision to build God's kingdom outside of the traditional institution.

The mission of the Ekklesia is to display God's image by making disciples of Jesus who make disciples of Jesus. This "work" was never designed to be done by the "professionals." I will continue to call on those institutional leaders who are guilty of both teaching and living in such a way that makes God's people think they must depend on the professional clergy in numerous ways. It's time for these professionals to repent of this and begin actually

equipping the saints to live as disciple makers. Many of today's "pastors" would contribute to the health and growth of God's kingdom by quitting, getting a normal job, and spending time with others helping them to become mature disciples of Jesus — that all nations would have the opportunity to be told about and shown the life that only Jesus' wonderful Gospel offers.

The past ten years I have worked a traditional job — because God called me to do this. I am not a "pastor" working in an institution, but I PASTOR several men (and women) who follow Jesus. I am not stating that it is wrong to have a religious institution or to "work" as an institutional "pastor." Our glorious Gospel allows for us to have much freedom to build God's kingdom using various methods based on the principles taught and modeled by Jesus and in scripture. My message is for us all to go back to scripture and see with fresh, spiritual eyes how Jesus modeled for us the way to build God's kingdom. My heart is heavy for so many "Christians" who are being taught that it is essential, vital, even NECESSARY to be "committed" to their institution. There is much to be corrected with this thinking and teaching; our commitment is truly to ONE ANOTHER and not to the building of any institution. This kind of teaching is rampant. Today's average "Christian" can't seem to meet another "Christian" without the first question being, "Where do you go to church?" This is very sad. I will continue to swim upstream by asking "Christians" I meet, "What is God doing in you, through you, and in and through those in your fellowship?" It seems to me that we will gain much ground by teaching each other that God isn't trying to get our institutions to grow in numbers; God is after inviting all people to become his children — that HIS image and message would be lived out and carried throughout HIS creation.

Reply

Fred on April 8, 2015 at 11:04 am

Loved your comments. Especially engagement vs attendance. Our church had a change of senior pastor along with a change of focus. Almost all of the ministries my wife and I were active in (and kept us engaged and attending) were dropped. Now, while we attend and are committed to our church. Our gaze often goes elsewhere to other ministries that can use our gifts. You are right on.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on April 8, 2015 at 4:03 pm

What you become involved in becomes the mission. That can be good, or not so good. Glad you are committed to your church!

Reply



Paul Roberts (<http://qfellowship.com/>) on April 7, 2015 at 8:11 am

This is a truly insightful list and certainly reflects all of the factors we have seen in our context. If our ministry is about us, then we become frustrated and angry at this trend. If our ministry is about the gospel, then we seek creative ways to better engage a shifting culture.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on April 8, 2015 at 4:03 pm

Glad it's resonating in your context Paul!

Reply



Eric Dye (<http://ericdye.it/>) on April 3, 2015 at 7:30 am

An insightful list, Carey.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on April 8, 2015 at 4:02 pm

Thanks Eric!

Reply

Valerie on April 2, 2015 at 10:30 am

I appreciate the insights and suggestions from several of your blog postings. I do believe the focus on mission from a previous blog is an excellent point. The church is Jesus' bride and needs to help people understand that its purpose is to point people to the bridegroom – Jesus. In my 17 years of working in the church, either as a lay leader or staff member, the most dedicated and loving servants are those who serve from the love they have from Christ and for Him. That said, there is one area within these posts (I haven't read each one with detail) that I believe is lacking and that is the discussion of how both men and women should be serving in all roles within the church from their place of gifting. The churches in America, in many denominations, continue to reserve roles based on gender and not on gifting. Even the comments on this blog come more from men than women, yet women make up a large percentage of our churches. I believe when we do not allow women to have their place alongside men in church leadership, we miss the ability to represent God in His fullness. Perhaps part of the decline in our church attendance can be subconsciously attributed to the way church is primarily male led with the absence of the female voice in the direction and ways in which we reach those in our community for Christ. I know this topic is controversial, yet should it be?

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on April 2, 2015 at 12:46 pm

Valerie...thanks for this. I agree that the body of Christ is best when everyone plays their role. And for sure, when the body is not what it was designed to be, we all suffer.

Reply

41 on April 1, 2015 at 7:15 pm

I attended a local church most of my childhood with my family. My brother tried to date every "friend" I brought to church and when it no longer worked out my friends ended up leaving because my family made them feel uncomfortable. I worked in the church singing since I was 6 years old, taught children's church, praise team and choir. We were expected to be in church every time the doors were open and we were. Finally I took a stand 4 years ago and went with my friend when she left because of my family. We attended a wonderful church with her family these past 4 years. But in the past 6 months she has pushed me out of her life. I don't "fit" with her and her family. My husband and daughters attend a satellite campus church and I prefer traditional. But these past 6 months I have found myself depressed and staying in bed on Sunday. It's hard finding a church where you feel like you fit in.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on April 1, 2015 at 9:09 pm

So sorry to hear this 41. That's heartbreaking. if you're dealing with a bit of depression or anxiety, here's a story that might help: <http://www.careynieuwhof.com/episode2>
(<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/episode2>)

Reply

anon on April 1, 2015 at 6:46 pm

I used to attend, volunteer, and lead in church regularly. Then I had my first child and received a diagnosis of post-partum depression/anxiety. My local church was split between PPD being merely a cry for attention and I was told to come back when things were normal or a sign that I had no faith where people tried to holds interventions and verbally attack me. Pregnant again and experiencing warning signs of PPD again I'm scared to rejoin our local church. Really wish the church would step up in areas of mental health as it's been a stigma I keep running into personally ☐

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on April 1, 2015 at 9:09 pm

Hi Anon...as I shared with 41 above, I hope this helps: <http://www.careynieuwhof.com/episode2> (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/episode2>). Praying you find hope and healing!

Reply

Karen on April 1, 2015 at 7:47 am

It's a generational thing. At my church, many children are dropped off at church on Wednesday nights by parents who rush home to do laundry. They don't bring the children to Sunday school and they attend Sunday morning service about twice a month. As children, they were dropped off to Sunday School and Wednesday night services and parents attended Sunday morning services with them most Sundays but never attended any discipleship classes themselves and their lifestyle wasn't congruent with the faith they affiliated themselves with. Inconsistency has bred greater inconsistency. Our culture confuses being an admirer of Christ with being a follower.

I also strongly believe that Christians who are still on milk need to be taught to eat meat so they can grow. We need our leaders to read the book of Romans, learn about the importance of sanctification and invite their flock into the experience so they can experience the fullness of joy that they can experience by remaining in Christ, becoming fruitful and learning to love their brothers in Christ with the deep fervor Jesus described in John 15.

Reply

Charles Henderson on March 26, 2015 at 4:54 pm

I would like to add SIN to the list and maybe move it up to #1.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on March 30, 2015 at 8:57 am

I hope you mean our sin as church leaders.

Reply

Charles Henderson on March 30, 2015 at 6:57 pm

Nope, that's not what I meant. (Although there is some truth to that) Not ALL church leaders sin. (I'm going to assume you know what i mean by that) Notwithstanding those with GENUINE concerns and hurts, many "committed" Christians are committed.....to sin! And in this "made to order" "self serve" culture, some "opt out" Contrary to what it appears, there are still a lot of BIBLE preaching (and teaching) ministers out there that will not compromise the Word of God, and preach it with LOVE and compassion, and many step away because of it.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on March 31, 2015 at 5:43 am

I agree that truth and grace are inseparable. Grace without truth isn't grace. And truth without grace isn't truth.

Reply



HSofia (<http://lareinacobre.com>) on March 25, 2015 at 1:42 pm

A reason I see (and that is relevant in my own life) is mixed faith marriages/relationships – where one person is into the church but the other is not. It's a lot easier to make the choice to commit to an institution or a congregation when you know that your partner will be present with you and also get something out of it. Also makes it a lot easier to give ones money to the church if it's something both adults in the family feel is valuable. When families have limited amounts of time to spend together, you look for the common denominator activities and affiliations...

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on March 30, 2015 at 8:58 am

That's very true. Some of the worst heartbreak I've seen in marriage is when couples are spiritually mismatched.

Reply

Maria on March 24, 2015 at 5:17 am

Most churches today compromise God's Word & are becoming more like the world, preaching messages that tickle people's ears, to be seen as relevant & cool. There are still some excellent Bible teaching pastors, but mostly people are starved from hearing the word of God. Most preach philosophy & psychology over God's word & even mix in New Age! If I wanted to hear philosophy I would become a Buddhist! My heart aches & I'm discouraged & disillusioned with church... More & more I find myself doing my own Bible study & bible research, & hear select messages at home online, with God's Holy Spirit leading. I grew up in church & after volunteering for 26+ years I burnt out. I'd spend 4 days each week at church helping in various ministries & even stayed overnight for 3 days doing work without sleep. The more I did the more people asked me to do! My family suffered, my marriage ended in divorce & my health suffered... Jesus only did ministry for 3 years... He never said burn yourself out, He said His yoke was easy, but man complicated things. The church needs to get back to first love, & seek first the Kingdom of God; teaching God's Word to feed the sheep & tend the lambs to strengthen, encourage & equip. We need to remember what Jesus disliked, what He commanded & what He taught & then follow His examples.

Reply

Charles Henderson on March 26, 2015 at 5:04 pm

Maria, I am so saddened to hear of your experience and will be sincerely praying for you. I am curious to know however, why did you volunteer so much? Were you made to feel that you had to? Did you have a hard time saying "no?" As a pastor, I try to be sensitive and respectful of our volunteers and often encourage them to tend to their first ministry...home. Each year, I give them an opportunity to step down or take a break even to the point that we might suspend or discontinue the ministry if we don't have anyone to volunteer.

[Reply](#)

Maria on March 28, 2015 at 8:03 am

Charles, thanks for the prayers. No, I wasn't made to feel I had to volunteer... in fact I really enjoyed volunteering until it became an overwhelming merry-go-round that would not stop. I'm a very giving person, but the pressure that built up over time at church, workplace & home front caused me to collapse. It's good to learn to say no & be reminded that you matter also to God. It's better to please God rather than man & only do what His Holy Spirit calls, strengthens & leads you to do. It's OK to take a sabbatical. God bless you.

[Reply](#)

Chuck on March 21, 2015 at 6:35 pm

An added reason from personal experience.... How 'bout a lack of community?

ALL during my postdoctoral work I practically boycotted church. There were three decent congregations near me and I had no vehicle. So it was the bus or nothing. One fellowship I really tried to get involved with was cold and indifferent. For almost six months nobody spoke to me. No one. I had to break the ice or otherwise be alone. This same church would eventually implode due to moral failure of the pastor.

I guess this is why I remain so driven or called to authentic community. If a church lacks that, I think twice. The Casting Crowns song 'If We Are the Body' became a battle cry once I got past that wilderness phase.

[Reply](#)

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on March 27, 2015 at 8:16 am

So true Chuck. I wish you were alone...but you're not. Many have had this frustration. Thanks for hanging in there!

[Reply](#)

Mom of 3 on March 19, 2015 at 12:17 pm

I don't enjoy going to church anymore because I feel "all used up". There is pressure to volunteer for things at the church, and guilt if you don't. Once you volunteer, you are used ravenously until you are all used up. There are 5 people in my family and we all volunteered for various duties such as assisting minister, lay reader, ushers, acolytes, etc. Our church would purposely schedule each member of our family to do a duty on a different Sunday, which meant we rarely got to sit together as a whole family. When we asked why, they told us they do it to force attendance. (You can't skip church if one of you is scheduled to perform a task!) My daughters volunteered to be youth representatives on the church council, which was a huge mistake. They now view church as a business run by bickering people who are never happy and can rarely agree on anything. They have both said the experience made them decide to never volunteer for anything at any church ever again, and left one of my daughters questioning her faith. Many churches are simply focused on the wrong thing. As a mom, I'm now focusing more on how to nurture my kids' relationship with God and MUCH less on my kids' relationship with church.

[Reply](#)

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on March 19, 2015 at 2:24 pm

That's so sad. The church should help, not hurt. I hope you can give your family a better experience of church than this parish provided.

[Reply](#)

Keymooney on April 17, 2015 at 2:45 pm

When an institutional "church" is focused on sustaining itself and its "leaders" teach/pressure its "members" to serve the institution, those "leaders" will be held accountable for their teachings and lifestyles. God's true Church is about one thing — making disciples of Jesus who make disciples of Jesus. It's time for people to start reading their Bibles and stop listening to institutional deceivers!!!!!! Jesus invites us to come and FOLLOW him. This means to DO what HE DID! I challenge anyone reading this to INVEST the time — in Jesus' name — to read through the four Gospels and the Book of Acts; then take a look at the religious institutions that are commonly called "churches" today. Do you find any similarities? It's time to repent, become true DISCIPLES of Jesus (the way that Jesus both taught and modeled for us), and start living for God's kingdom purposes. When Jesus said before his ascension that our marching orders were to GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES, he meant it!! Disciples make disciples — pure and simple! "I am the vine and you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, HE WILL BEAR MUCH FRUIT." Are you a fruit bearing follower of Jesus? If you are not obeying Jesus and making disciples, it's time. If YOU need discipling, ask God to provide a few others who will teach and model for

you how to become a disciple MAKER. May Jesus build his church on HIS Earth; he will continue to invite those who are trapped under religious teachings to come and have their thirsts quenched — by JESUS HIMSELF!

Reply

Bob Stenson on March 18, 2015 at 5:27 pm

Failure to discern the body of Christ. I don't mean Communion. I mean the Church, the Body of Christ. That may include several of Carey's points in his article, since discerning the Body of Christ has wide scope. It includes understanding the purpose, orders, gifts, ministries, and offices. As the physical body is one and has many members, so also is Christ. The Church isn't a group of people. It's a group of ministries. The fleshly nature isn't a ministry. The ministry is the Christ in you. The Church is a living body, not an organization. It's a body that's called to come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man. That's not perfect men and women. That's a totally complete man. This man is a Body on Earth in total submission and unity to the Head in Heaven and to each other. That's the purpose of the worship meetings, which has a specific order for that purpose. There is a purpose and no one can achieve that purpose by being independent or by making up orders, gifts, ministries, and offices.

Reply

LA_Mom on March 17, 2015 at 10:10 pm

You can love the church and still see the problems with it – and discuss them without it being a rant. One of the reasons people are showing up less might just be divisive leadership ideas like this one... Why are we not allowed to discuss what needs to change without the underlying idea that we don't love the church or we're "on a rant." □

We rarely go any longer, after 43 years of solid attendance. That's because we discovered we are the church, we don't "go" to one, and we are busy out there being the church to the world. A big part of why we don't go to church is because it was always focused on just getting people into the building rather than letting us out of the building and into the world... There has been very little real training and equipping for people to go out and be light and salt... it was mostly all about the "professionals" being qualified and very few others... Now we're building community, and actually being of some use to the world as the church. We still go back to visit... like a family reunion or something where you can catch up with all the cousins. □

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on March 18, 2015 at 5:30 am

I love the way you say it. You can love the church but still see the problems with it. Exactly. Thanks!

Reply

Keymooney on April 17, 2015 at 2:49 pm

LA_MOM — beautifully written. Remain on the path that HS has guided you to. You are an inspiration to those caught up in institutionalism. Praise God!

[Reply](#)**SpecialNeeds** on March 17, 2015 at 2:27 pm

Another reason is families who have family members with special needs. Many families are now affected by many different issues where their children will simply not 'sit' through a service or Sunday school. If the church doesn't have support for them then they have to leave the service when the child won't sit still and the parents don't get the benefit of attending anyway (miss the sermon, have to leave etc)

[Reply](#)**bossnosee** on March 16, 2015 at 6:07 am

Well after I realized that all my neighbors were literally on fire right now, and I am safe and guaranteed to be safe, sitting in church gorging myself on sermons while I can hear my neighbor screaming for their dear life seemed over-indulgent. Certainly church picnics are out. It was after the tsunami that it hit me. Millions of people washed away, and where was I? Eating fried chicken at the harvest festival.

[Reply](#)**Isobel** on March 15, 2015 at 2:29 pm

We are not able to keep our young people interested. Our sunday school ages 10 to 16 are not attending anymore. They are the Future church. What can we do?

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on March 15, 2015 at 2:33 pm

Isobel...thank you. I love your heart. Your question is the reason I write this blog. Also check out incredible resources by Orange at <http://www.whatisorange.org> (<http://www.whatisorange.org>).

Reply

River on March 15, 2015 at 8:39 am

I think the church denying the fact that it's an institution could be part of it. I've seen lots of Christian friends drawn to more Orthodox and traditional institutions (Orthodox Christianity, Catholicism, even Judaism.) Perhaps Christianity is simply entering the next stage of evolution as a religion. Perhaps being an institution is a thing to be embraced.

Reply

Mike Miledi on March 15, 2015 at 1:19 am

Churches of all denominations are failing to engage their congregations on a higher intellectual level. The clergy are abdicating the historical, philosophical and theological high ground to appeal to us on an almost juvenile level. Is it any surprise that church goers are responding like children?

Reply

Phyllis Amenda on March 14, 2015 at 10:20 pm

Another reason for declining attendance is increased work hours by many. I work 2 jobs, about 50-60 hours per week. Some find they have to work on Sundays. Some, like me, simply find themselves so burned out that Sunday am may be their only down time. Over a year ago, I dropped out of a parish I love due to exhaustion. I work late every Sat. night and don't have the energy to jump up on Sunday mornings any more.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on March 15, 2015 at 2:26 pm

Work could easily be reason 11. Thanks. And bless you...it sounds exhausting.

Reply

Kimo on April 8, 2015 at 4:03 pm

Yes, I have pretty much had to work 7 days a week since the economic collapse in 2008. But I do go to church every Sunday morning because that church is my “down time,” and I actually find it rejuvenates me.

Reply



Salmon Crow on March 9, 2015 at 9:38 pm

There is a couple of other aspects. One is that far fewer couples have the same beliefs. When both were going to the village church, that's one thing. When only one is going to church, and the other will not, church might also mean loss of weekend time with that partner, who has to look after the kids, etc.

The second is that many people have been hurt by the church, but remain Christian in belief. If you've been abused at a Christian orphanage, beaten at a Christian church, denounced as a sinner, been treated as an outcast, well, those things have happened to a lot of people. I still want to be a Christian – but will never be willing to throw my lot in 100%.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on March 10, 2015 at 5:55 am

Thank you Salmon. Things we wish weren't true but for many people are true.

[Reply](#)

Keymooney on April 17, 2015 at 3:07 pm

May God show you that the pain you've experienced by institutions is his way of showing you HIS way. If you truly are "Christian in belief," then understand that belief means trust. Trusting Jesus means that we gladly FOLLOW HIM. If HE IS who he said he is — the king of the universe — then his life and words are TRUE. Jesus clearly taught and modeled that HE is the source of our life. He offers us HIS eternal kind of life. Read the four Gospels — slowly and soberly, asking Holy Spirit to enlighten your mind and spirit. Throwing your lot in 100% is actually the greatest life we could ever imagine. That life as a true disciple of Jesus does need to be correctly defined and understood though. It is SCRIPTURE that will clear this up for us though and not any man. Choosing to live as Jesus' disciple — as described and modeled by Jesus himself — is the only way to real life!

[Reply](#)

jfkaess on March 8, 2015 at 2:35 pm

Aging demographic. My wife and i still value attendance at our church, but as we age we are often less able to make the drive and more often physically struggling.

[Reply](#)

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on March 10, 2015 at 5:55 am

Very true!

Reply



Greg Bentall on March 7, 2015 at 12:29 pm

While church attendance is dwindling, the cost of running a church keeps increasing. This means that churches spend more and more time and effort on fundraising. The numbers tell a lot. First, the church has high costs for salaries and occupancy costs. After that, there are only a few dollars left for programming and supplies. And after that there is only pennies for ministry beyond the walls. This phenomenon is growing ever worse.

The average church family gives 2% of its income to the church. The church spends 98% of its budget and gives 2% for feeding the poor and similar concerns. So, mission beyond the walls gets 2% of 2%, which is not a very big number.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on March 7, 2015 at 3:04 pm

Thanks Greg. I think for sure that's the financial picture in declining churches but not the reality for all churches. I think that's what happens when the mission becomes maintenance or saying alive. Thanks for the perspective.

[Reply](#)

rudy on March 5, 2015 at 3:09 pm

I understand where the author is coming from but do not be mistaken these issues are the FRUIT of the problem not the ROOT .. the ROOT of the problem is a HEART problem .. a relationship with CHRIST problem .. the FRUIT will never change until the ROOT changes

[Reply](#)

Nikole Hahn - Cataclysm Missio on March 5, 2015 at 8:50 am

How about people who only share one day off with their spouse and it is on a Sunday? That's why our church includes a small group and Bible Study. We may go to actual church once or twice a month on average, but our attendance is actually every week when you combine small group and Bible Study. Our small group does a video sermon once a month and prays for and writes our church supported missionaries at the other meeting. We give online so our giving never decreases even if we aren't there on Sunday. I disagree with middle class becoming upper class. That isn't happening in Arizona. – NH

[Reply](#)

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on March 5, 2015 at 2:58 pm

Nikole...thanks for this. I can imagine how hard it is when you have one day together. Personally, I would want to spend part of that with the gathered church. But I can understand how others would feel differently. Appreciate that it doesn't feel like the middle class is growing richer...that was just research I was sharing. Not opinion.

Reply

Nikole Hahn - Cataclysm Missio on March 5, 2015 at 4:01 pm

It is difficult. It's definitely unique. Perhaps some day our hours will be normal. LOL. They must have researched back east. j/k. :o)

Reply

Pastor A on March 4, 2015 at 2:02 am

Carey, thanks for this. What an intriguing reality check.
I hear the question "how much value are we creating?" in every point of this post.
Navigating these issues is both helpful and challenging and im glad someone is speaking to this. Thanks Again!

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on March 4, 2015 at 5:37 am

Pastor A. Thanks. And you're right...that's a great and haunting question.

Reply

Scott Newman on March 2, 2015 at 1:10 pm

Great post Carey! Two thoughts, one practical and one philosophical.

First, after living and serving at a church in the Northwest US, we noticed that weather played a significant role in people attending or not. Sundays with typical Northwest gray and drizzle and the room was much fuller than sunny, warm days when people were out to take advantage of what little sun the Northwest has to offer.

However, I definitely think that this observation only makes sense in light of the larger cultural shifts and trends that you named above.

Secondly, at the last church in which I served, the missional nature of the church initially worked against attendance at our Sunday gatherings. When the church was planted, there was a heavy emphasis on being the church in the everyday stuff of life as opposed to just a couple of hours on a Sunday morning. While that emphasis was good, people took that to mean that attendance on Sunday wasn't as important as living in community during the week. So while we had a ton of committed people, their commitment wasn't to our Sunday gathering.

I would be curious to know how many other churches, in particular young church plants, have a similar struggle.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on March 2, 2015 at 5:35 pm

Scott. Thanks for this! I hope others jump in on your questions. My observation is that the weather is an issue everywhere. In the south, rain keeps people away. I've heard people stay away because of wind. And yes, I've also heard people who have prioritized groups and not so much Sundays. Great points.

Reply

Charles Henderson on March 26, 2015 at 4:09 pm

Weather in the west is a "problem" too...sunny Sundays make for good surf & play!!! ☐

Reply

Charles Hodsdon on February 28, 2015 at 6:45 pm

I find myself in the attending less camp. After a 14 year run as a church staff member at 3 different churches, I find myself on the outside. After resigning from my last post I spent 9 months looking for a new church home, knowing I was too burnt out to go back to vocational ministry. I bounced around attendance wise, and emotionally. At times I felt like the whole system was broken and not worth my time, at other times I longed for the unity that can accomplish so much more than one can accomplish alone... I've considered planting, I've considered being a hermit. At present I am leading a small group of other disenfranchised Christians, and making sure I spend quality time with people who still love Sunday mornings. My family 'attends church' once a month, but we are more focused on being the church to those we meet, than we have ever been. My point is this, if you have a healthy body that values your engagement, cherish it, try imagining your life without it, and pray for those of us who find ourselves disconnected. Some of us don't want to be disconnected, we just haven't been able to find anything that looks like the New Testament ecclesia.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on March 1, 2015 at 8:32 am

Charles...great to hear from you again. I really hope you continue to heal from your burnout. I pray you find some very deep healing. Hope is the antidote to depression. Keep looking. Don't give up on the mission and take some time to get well.

Reply

michael on February 28, 2015 at 3:22 pm

Good insights. I can't argue with any of them, but I do see a similarity in most of them that may offend some folks, and it isn't about the church. I think that the big shift you are noting have a lot to do with people becoming more and more self focused. The "guilt" I feel about not showing up on Sunday is not about being ashamed of bad attendance, but rather about diminishing the corporate worship experience, and what I might be able to contribute. A common denominator in your observations is that the focus is on "what do I get out of this" instead of "what do I contribute to all of this".

Reply

EcoWoman1021 on February 28, 2015 at 5:43 pm

I don't generally feel welcome, or free, to contribute anything. And I don't have enough energy to spend it on cooking church dinners in the hopes that I might inspire someone while peeling potatoes. I'm old enough that I am running out of energy.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on March 1, 2015 at 8:33 am

Michael I think that's right. Consumer Christianity is dying...and we will be forced to give, not get. That's going to be a wonderful shift.

Reply

Rick King on February 28, 2015 at 11:02 am

As a pastor, I'm encountering a clash between the institutional needs of a local church like feeding the building overhead, with the need to get smaller and more relational that might lead to the greater engagement Carey's talking about in this post. A friend of mine in another state recently led his local church through a discernment process that eventually resulted in their selling their building to an SBC congregation that could use the space, and are now renting a storefront in a local strip mall. The creative energy he says the selling of their building has freed up has been huge, and although there's no single cure for what ails local churches, I think for many mainline protestant churches like mine, the building has become an albatross. We either need to rethink how we use and share our buildings (i.e., community-centered ministry) or get rid of them. The sanctuary of my church's campus, built in '63, has ALWAYS been too big: it was built in the heyday of the mainline church, and their vision of the future was unimpeded growth that warranted a large, amphitheater-style sanctuary, and even at the congregation's largest size, it never filled that sanctuary with worshipers. Now we are trying to figure out what to do with that space, when our congregation's worship style is more in-a-circle and interactive, and not everybody-facing-forward-toward-a-single-speaker-up-front.

As a symbol of "Institution", the building of many local churches has to be replaced by the notion of a "movement", and if that means getting rid of or thinking differently about buildings and the message they send—as well as the money and brain space they take away from ministry and mission—then we have to work toward that.

Reply

EcoWoman1021 on February 28, 2015 at 10:15 pm

There is an excellent book called "The Problem of Wineskins: Church Structure in Technological Age" by Howard A. Snyder. You can still get it used from Amazon, last time I looked. I highly recommend it if you haven't already read it.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on March 1, 2015 at 8:34 am

Thanks for the recommendation!

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on March 1, 2015 at 8:33 am

Love the movement idea. That's what the church at its best has always been. Thanks!

Reply

Dale on February 28, 2015 at 10:03 am

I agree with every point you made. There are no easy answers. I do know that eliminating worship service or Sunday school options (as some churches are doing) is not the answer. When we, as church leaders, "accept" this new normal we inadvertently encourage it.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on March 1, 2015 at 8:30 am

Very perceptive and well said Dale. Thank you.

Reply

Brian on February 28, 2015 at 6:39 am

It is refreshing to hear this. I'm mid 40s and growing up, we went to church because its what you did. As kids, we complained...but there simply was not any competition for events and activities on Sunday. The church programming was boring, but there were no other restaurants, youth sports, or much of anything going on back then on a Sunday morning. We have seen Sunday School attendance decline even after thoughtful planning, communication, and programming.

Reply

Danita Light on February 27, 2015 at 4:39 pm

I know I can't speak for everyone, but for our family the overwhelming factor has been a combination of burnout and (unintentional) isolation. The last church we attended regularly was truly a church home, but there were usually about 10 individuals and families doing almost everything that wasn't "fun" to do. The same people ran the youth group, played in the worship band, taught Sunday school, did setup/teardown between events, planned and executed community ministry events, etc. We spent about three years being involved in our church on many levels leading up to the birth of our first daughter. A lot of things went wrong with her birth, and we were gone for 4 of the 5 months immediately following it (my husband is in the military and we landed in Georgia for a while). Although there was the isolated meal brought over, for the most part we didn't have the time or energy to juggle church events and services with learning how to take care of a child and dealing with my severe postpartum depression. Someone would occasionally "like" a picture or update on Facebook, and that was about it. It was incredibly painful to watch a community that we had poured so much into appear to partially forget that we existed, or, if they remembered, not be able or willing to put the effort into even calling to ask how things were going.

The problem was further compounded by the arrival of our second daughter 15 months later. Breastfeeding was incredibly important to me and was something that never succeeded with my first daughter. We went to great lengths to ensure the success of that aspect of parenting with our second. It was therefore greatly discouraging to be asked to feed her in a designated, separate "cry room" in each of the last three churches we attended, out of fear that by sitting at the very back of the sanctuary, someone might perchance be offended to see a baby discreetly nursing. This was even further compounded by the apparent fact that no one had bothered to check any of these cry rooms for some time to make sure the systems designed to relay the message were actually working. After the same experience three different places, I asked myself what the point was in even attending a church if it was only to sit in a silent room by myself for an hour with a high-needs baby who was extremely aware that she was not in her normal place of sleeping during the middle of

nap time, while my 1 year old cried in the nursery because she didn't know where her mommy and daddy were. I got to a point of asking myself what Jesus taught us about children, and could no longer reconcile the idea of ministry, especially ministry within our own family, to what church was actually looking like for us.

This is absolutely not a "me-first", entitlement type of post. I understand why churches may be uncomfortable with someone breastfeeding during the service, even if I have a different opinion about it. I believe in not being divisive. But at some point the premise of not offending anyone has to give way to true ministry. This is true of attendees, sermon content, and ministry outreach. One of the things that I repeatedly see emphasized in many churches is the idea that you have to have someone else ministering to you in order to be an effective ministry for others. God created us as social creatures, and both technology and culture are rapidly teaching us to isolate ourselves from others. The ability to hit "like" on Facebook has replaced us actually having to *do* anything for each other, because we can pat ourselves on the back for keeping up with the people we care about and go about our days telling ourselves that we'll do something to get in the trenches and help tomorrow. I have seen in multiple churches now that there is usually a small circle of people pouring into the rest of the congregation, and one by one they flame out – because no one is pouring into them, aside from that same tired circle that slowly disintegrates over time. Community is dependent on everyone involved in it getting down in the dirt and helping with the business of support and encouragement, even if only occasionally.

People in general are lately uncomfortable with the idea that life is messy and there are often not quick or easy solutions. It's hard to come alongside someone and admit that all you can do is pray and be there for them as they struggle through difficulty, because we live in the world where we can go online and donate \$100 to an impoverished child in another country and feel like we've actually solved a problem. The real world is not "clean" like the internet, and most people are not willing to make an investment in it if they can't immediately see results that validate their effort.

Reply

bob on March 15, 2015 at 5:50 pm

Dear Guest,

I am retired and have two grown up children. Life can be a struggle and has been for me when I was working. People let us down and we all let God down. We must walk with Jesus and rely on His strength. I don't think I have ever seen a church where there was the kind of commitment that we all long for. I don't even think it existed in much of the early church. We are being tested and commanded to love the unlovely just as Jesus did and it is very hard at times when we see selfishness in the church. When we are given strength through our personal prayers, we must set an example for others regardless of their failings and God will bless our efforts.

May God bless you and yours and lift you up in this time of discouragement.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on March 16, 2015 at 5:13 am

Thanks Bob!

Reply

LA_Mom on March 17, 2015 at 10:42 pm

Um, nice thought, Bob, but that's not the answer. The answer should be leaders and people being woken up to the janus-faced behavior of the church and doing something about it. Why are we meeting if not to build community? I guess people need to be told to be there for each other. If everyone longs for it and no one talks about it, then why bother meeting at all? It's like a double standard to say we should all meet, but hey, we should just rely on the power of our prayers and let God be our encouragement... why bother spending 3 hours on a Sunday with fake friends and people who forget you as soon as you walk out the door (or need something, which is just scary). I think we've been trained for so long to follow the leader and let the pros handle everything that most people think they're just there for the show or to clean the bathrooms or run the sound board. Relationships are not something that the church, as she stands on an organizational level, really fosters. Cooperation, yes. Community, no.

Reply

Friend on April 8, 2015 at 12:58 pm

You might actually need to forgive others for letting you down. I know it's really disheartening and disappointing when we put a lot into church ministries and relationships, and then feel forgotten during trials in our lives when we ourselves need extra care. Believe me, I know, we went through a really difficult time and really needed help, but didn't get it through our church. No one offered to help at all. In our pain, we asked ourselves, "What's the use of going to this church, when they don't act like a church?" Well after several months (and the problem was resolved, so we were a lot less stressed), we really missed our church. We went back, even though we were still angry. During service our first time back, I realized how strong my anger was, and

how wrong it was for me to hold onto it. I prayed for healing. When we're really hurt, we have to remember that forgiveness isn't saying that what others did was right. It's just letting go of the anger that's harming us, and not wishing there were some way to make them pay for what they did. Anyway, I'm so glad we went back. Really. I learned a lot from the experience. I also learned that we ourselves didn't help the situation. Like I had been too proud to actually let anyone know just how bad our situation was. One person did know, and they refused our request for help, so I didn't tell anyone else. The others had their own things going on, and they didn't notice how much we needed help. I also realized how the stress we were under, colored my experience, and that I was seeing more negative than good in our church, which wasn't objective or real. It's not perfect, that's for sure, but nothing here on earth is. I realized how much I was contributing to the problem of their "not caring" because I didn't let them know everything because I was afraid they wouldn't care and would reject us like the one person... Kind of a feedback loop that was all wrong. I see now that most of them probably wouldn't do much still today if given the chance, but some of them would have, and my fear of rejection kept them from having that chance. If we hold anger and unforgiveness in our hearts, there will be a wedge between us and God, and it will extend to all our relationships. I kept coming up against that commandment and knew that I had to let it go, because I don't want anything coming between God and me. And it didn't hurt at all, in fact I felt instant relief and gratitude to be released from that anger! So what I'm saying is, I know you've been hurt and let down, and I understand why. But maybe give them another chance. You will probably find out that most of the people who you thought didn't care just weren't aware of exactly what was happening in your life. They should have reached out, yes. But you could've reached out too. Give it a try, you'll feel a lot better. One thing is for sure, the LAST place you want to be when you're going through something devastating is in isolation. On the other hand, that's the FIRST

place satan wants you to be. Sorry for the unasked for advice, but I see a lot of hurt in your posts and I know where you're coming from, so I hope this helps. God bless you and your family!

LA_Mom on April 8, 2015 at 2:38 pm

I have no unforgiveness in me, nor am I angry or still hurt. Just wide awake to the the profound and systemic problems in our current church model, and the desire within many for something better and more authentic.

Friend on April 8, 2015 at 3:37 pm

That's true, there are many problems and there are many solutions... There are a lot of insightful posts here that help to define many common issues. I've been really frustrated with it many times, and I'm sure I will be again (unfortunately). Sometimes, I just want to watch Dr. Stanley's sermons online and not have to interact with anyone. But I always come up against the fact that there are many OT scriptures where God commands the people to worship, sing, and praise Him in the assembly; Jesus went to church; and even though He didn't specifically command us to go to

church, there are many NT scriptures that speak of how we are the Body and we are to worship in community. So if I love God, I can't opt out of what is so important to Him. That's the bottom line. I have to be mature about my own commitment and responsibilities to developing my faith, and I realize that isolation stunts my growth. So I'm dealing with people who are as imperfect as I am, working my way through my relationship with the Lord and with the others He has called to be in relationship with Him. And I'm trying to reserve judgment on those I thought weren't kind to us, and strengthening my relationships with those who are kind. I needed an attitude adjustment in my own way as much as I thought they needed it! :))

SeeksTruth on June 13, 2015 at 6:09 pm

I relate to your comments, so much. My husband and I were also heavily invested in our church, then our son became severely mentally ill. I tried desperately to hold onto the church, but we needed support and love desperately, and it was like everyone just evaporated. I vividly remember my last morning in church, in severe pain and crying, and I looked around at everyone singing... And all I saw was plastic. It was all fake. I left that morning, and never went back. I completely agree, why go when there's no authentic community?

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on June 14, 2015 at 3:16 pm

So sorry to hear about your experience. If you're anywhere near LA, you should check with Saddleback Church with Rick Warren. Rick could completely relate to being judged for having a son with mental illness.



Volodia Baran on February 27, 2015 at 3:03 pm

"I don't actually believe that church is an institution. I think it's a movement...not an institution!" Thanks! That's inspired me because in our church I see that movement and other people who came to us in first time see that too!

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 27, 2015 at 3:21 pm

Yep...it's a movement. Thank you!

Reply

joel on February 27, 2015 at 2:53 pm

Thanks for helping put a face on what is happening with church attendance. There is a windstorm of change happening now in our nation/churches. Used to... good program + good preaching = people; not so much now. Even on the home front, we pastors are having to become missionaries of the gospel. We have to learn new ways (Language) to speak the same good news. We don't water down ever!!! But we do recognize if people don't understand, we have to speak language in which they can understand. Thanks for helping me sharpen tools for reaching people with the gospel.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 27, 2015 at 3:21 pm

So right Joel, the old formulas are breaking down in front of our eyes.

Reply



mykl56 on February 27, 2015 at 2:24 pm

This was a helpful article, it has led to a number of significant conversations. Thanks for your courage in sharing

[Reply](#)

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 27, 2015 at 3:20 pm

Glad the conversations are happening!

[Reply](#)

Joanne Flanders on February 27, 2015 at 1:52 pm

My husband & I were raised in families where church attendance was “required” every Sun. I have been the organist in a variety of denominations since I was a middle teen. We continued with the “every Sunday” attendance with our children. My husband has served as a trustee, deacon, elder & choir member. In addition to my organ playing & general choir work, I’ve served as a trustee & parish nurse. However, attending our “home church” is now not very pleasant. The congregation is quite honestly split in a variety of ways. Behaviors don’t feel “Christian”. Giving to others consists of writing a check, not actually having a relationship of serving “others”. We don’t attend as regularly as we once did, instead choosing to serve others in several communities which need help. We don’t like to see what’s happening in the mainline churches so we’re out where we see help is needed. When pastors & congregants are less sincere about relationships & concentrate on buildings, attendance will drop. I’d like it to not be this way but “real” is “real”.

[Reply](#)

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 27, 2015 at 3:19 pm

I'm so sorry to hear this Joanne.

Reply

Betsy Strain on February 27, 2015 at 1:29 pm

The church- the Body of Christ in ministry- needs to find ways to be the church where the people are. How can the church provide spiritual resources to help families grow in faith in their everyday family activities? Gather as family before sporting event and pray a blessing for the teams involved. Offer support to other families involved in activities. Be surrogate grandparents to families far from families. Provide midweek or other weekend times for grandparents and kids to join together in missional opportunities. In home gatherings for Bible Study. Lunch bunch prayer groups. Other opportunities during the week to meet for worship experiences.

Too often we judge people's engagement or dedication to faith by number of times in worship on Sunday morning. We need to affirm the ways that people live out faith daily. For me- I find it important to be in worship with my church family on Sunday Morning, but then I'm OldSchool. I rejoice at the times that I can be with those infrequent attenders rather than judge their non-attendance.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 27, 2015 at 3:18 pm

Right on Betsy. No judgment.

Reply

Kevin Duecker on February 27, 2015 at 1:28 pm

There's so much diversity in the comments on this blog and it simply represents the diversity of humanity in general. Each commenter has his/her own story and a geographic region from which he/she hails. Some of us are in an urban setting, some of us are rural or small town. Others are from somewhere in-between. We've been influenced in dynamic ways.

With such diversity, there's not going to be a "clear answer" on the focal issue of this blog post. I think Pastor Carey's insights are worthwhile for consideration because they do encapsulate the majority of people's experiences, but they are not a fix-all remedy. Carey doesn't address them as such and I like that he's merely tossing out food for conversation. As Christians, we need to learn to be more open-minded and learn to be comfortable to take part in a conversation that's not easy.

May the conversation that takes place in the comments of this post be productive, engaging, and a demonstration of the UNITY that we do have in the love and hope of Christ Jesus.

Thanks Pastor Carey for sharing your heart's burden over this issue for us other leaders to know that we're not alone in observing this disheartening trend. As church leaders our hearts break because we see people who are lost and our desire and calling is to lead them into a relationship with Jesus. This a calling that we

often lose sleep over and I appreciate you boldly helping us “lead like never before” even when the field can be controversial.

Thanks for starting and continuing the conversation in this regard. I enjoy reading your insights and am often challenged to grow in new ways. Blessings!

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 27, 2015 at 3:18 pm

Some really solid insights Kevin. And for sure, these are just my ideas. I pray they help. That’s why I write. And I love learning from others. Great comments add to that.

Reply

Don (<http://www.nbcph.org>) on February 27, 2015 at 12:53 pm

A much needed and appreciated post.
Seems reasons for attendance are easily replaced with excuses to stay away in our local church.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 27, 2015 at 3:17 pm

Thanks Don!

Reply

Todd (<http://gracebaptistsb.org>) on February 27, 2015 at 12:53 pm

Well said!

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 27, 2015 at 3:17 pm

Thanks Todd!

Reply

Alex Kirk on February 27, 2015 at 12:42 pm

Great post, Carey. First time on your site and as a newish lead pastor in a newish church, we face this issue all the time. We call it our bi-polar attendance pattern and we've hit a glass ceiling in our growth as a result. You've nailed some key stuff here and I've passed it along to my peeps for discussion. Thanks for the insights.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 27, 2015 at 3:17 pm

Alex...love that you're starting out in leadership. Hope the discussion goes well!

Reply

Paul Cummings on February 27, 2015 at 12:30 pm

I read this post and passed it along to the pastor of my church. We are a small, very personal, interactive church. We have converted an old medical centre into a church where our chairs are not bolted to the floor, have rooms which at one time were exam rooms that we use for children's ministries, and we have a great congregation that in the last 16 months has grown from 6 – 10 per week to a minimum of 30 each week. We have 36 on our list of "members". We recognize that some come from a long distance each week and in the winter, weather can be a factor in them getting there. We also recognize some of our members are older and in some cases not well and therefore, are not able to attend every Sunday. Work on Sunday mornings for some, prevent them from attending as well. So we see why our congregation fluctuates from week to week. The key is that it is growing and new members continue to join. It's a small setting, 2 worship teams, a women's and men's fellowship, youth outreach to name but a few of the ministries our members participate

in. Sundays are always open to anyone who wants to develop or deepen their relationship with Jesus. Every second Sunday, we have a themed Fellowship after the service and food that fits the theme is brought into the church, the sanctuary is turned into a dining room and we share a meal together. My point, some may feel that “church” is too big, pastor’s uncaring or just there for the money and therefore, not feeding their congregation. If that’s what you feel at the church you attend, find a smaller church that fits your needs. Sometimes, large buildings and services that fit hundreds are necessary because those churches attract people. Connexus and Northpoint are just examples but people are being drawn to Christ and building a relationship with him. In larger churches, often there is the opportunity to join a smaller group that meets through the week to go “deeper”. Even in my church, we offer a series of at least six weeks every couple of months and as small as we are, people still sign up and attend the series we are running. So my suggestion would be, if you are in a larger church, seek out a small group, if that doesn’t exist, discuss it with your pastor. If you are still feeling unfulfilled, find a church that meets your needs. There are many smaller, local churches out there where the Holy Spirit is moving in leaps and bounds. Thanks Carey for a great post!

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 27, 2015 at 3:17 pm

Paul...some great ideas and great points. Thank you! I love your heart for the local church.

Reply

BillHammy on February 27, 2015 at 12:21 pm

So timely Carey. As a church plant out on the Left Coast, we are wrestling with building core with bought-in Christians so that we can be a church for unchurched people. We have AMAZING volunteers. But there is a noticeable shift in Canadian churches that Christians are not attending church regularly. Bought-in, amazing folks. It's so easy to focus on getting non-faith folks and wanting to engage them, but there is an equally important focus to ask how we can build core in this culture to reach those outside the faith. This post is a great springboard for great discussion. We've used it at our staff meeting and at our elders meeting. Thanks for raising this issue and looking at it's roots. Thought provoking.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 27, 2015 at 3:16 pm

Hey I am ON the left coast right now Bill! Stuck in the airport but wishing we could hang out. En route to Portland and then home. I'm waving.

Reply

Bill Hamilton on February 27, 2015 at 3:31 pm

Waving back at you. Two words Carey: Voodoo Donuts. Enjoy the trip!

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 27, 2015 at 3:32 pm

Oh man...

Reply



Michael on February 27, 2015 at 12:18 pm

As someone who works Sunday mornings I rely on our church's podcast and my wife filling me in. Then I am at as many engagement opportunities to havtherelationships. It was a hard choice between a schedule were I could attend weekly, but miss out on everything in the evenings or miss Sunday morning and then go to evening events. But I can't wait to get back to going again in the future if I can transition jobs.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 27, 2015 at 3:15 pm

Love your heart Michael!

Reply

Nathan Walter on February 27, 2015 at 12:12 pm

Much like #1 being greater affluence, I'd add that there are lots of people in certain areas that have to work on Sundays. I have lots of people in my area who want to go to church, but they also have to pay the bills, so going to church on a Sunday morning is to choose between church or taking care of their family.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 27, 2015 at 3:15 pm

Very true! Thanks Nathan.

Reply

Dave Miller (<http://www.nechristian.edu>) on February 27, 2015 at 11:48 am

Carey, awesome sauce...this is the kind of honest gut check leaders everywhere need. It's the kind of input future leaders like the ones we are around here in Omaha need too! Definitely putting it in front of them, keep doing what you are doing!

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 27, 2015 at 3:15 pm

Thanks Dave! Hope all is well.

Reply

Brian French (<http://www.brianandkrista.com>) on February 27, 2015 at 11:48 am

Great post Carey.

In regards to #9, the challenge of this shifting reality is not to immediately judge those who are not weekly attending, or feel bad for myself when they don't. In other words, in my ministry, I tend to shy away from those who pull away. Perhaps a solution is to lean into those who are perhaps less engaged to graciously find out why and hopefully help them engage from where they are, and train our leaders to do the same.

Does Connexus use any other metrics for measuring engagement?

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 27, 2015 at 3:14 pm

Thanks Brian. I shy away from people who pull away too. And no, not yet. But we're working on it.

[Reply](#)

tsmith113 on February 27, 2015 at 11:43 am

Cary, this is a great post. While not all ten apply there is enough there for a good discussion at an Elder meeting!!

[Reply](#)

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 27, 2015 at 3:14 pm

Thanks!

[Reply](#)

Tim on February 27, 2015 at 11:39 am

I just want to add.. I live in a resort town where the major industry is service oriented, thus their jobs don't fit into traditional service times. We are moving to do a Sat pm, Sun am & Mon pm service time in order to get options. Because online church service only gives you information not relationships which is crucial, even required for growth in the body. ☐

[Reply](#)

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 27, 2015 at 3:14 pm

Tony Morgan recently wrote a post called Thursday Is the New Sunday...all about mid week services that preview the weekend for that very reason.

[Reply](#)

Tim on February 27, 2015 at 11:35 am

Always insightful and a catalyst for some serious think. ty Carey..

[Reply](#)

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 27, 2015 at 3:13 pm

Thanks Tim!

[Reply](#)

dreamyjeanie on February 27, 2015 at 11:28 am

I grew up in the 50s. We went to church every Sunday, no excuses. In the 60s, changes came. The old people groaned and moaned but the young people with their long hair, weird clothes, etc. took to the streets. They were "Jesus Freaks" with VW vans and flowers. They took Jesus out of the main stream church and introduced him to people on the streets and the beaches. It was breath-taking and sometimes painful. There were a lot of people leaving "main stream" denominations. New churches sprang up and then the mega churches appeared. Now that's all old news and again the search is on for new vibrancy. We have old news and new news but Jesus is always the "Good News" which doesn't change. Only the vehicles to share that news change. So church attendance patterns change. That just means it's time to change the vehicle, not the message.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 27, 2015 at 3:13 pm

Perspective is so valuable, isn't it Jeanie? Everything old is new again...

Reply

dreamyjeanie on February 27, 2015 at 3:58 pm

hope it gave you an insight..

[Reply](#)

Brian Jennings (<http://brianjenningsblog.com/>) on February 27, 2015 at 11:20 am

Our Elders and Staff have had some good email and face-to-face discussions based on this. Thanks for giving us food to chew on. Blessings.

[Reply](#)

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 27, 2015 at 3:12 pm

So glad Brian. Working this post into a new book releasing soon. Hope that can help even a bit more. □

[Reply](#)

Bret Hammond (<http://awordfortheweary.com>) on February 27, 2015 at 11:18 am

In my experience I've seen two big factors in committed church attenders attending less often:

1. (I think this one relates to your #'s 2 and 4) They love their grandkids. They want to be very supportive and engaging with their grandkids. If the grandchild has an athletic competition that day, or there's an opportunity to spend more time with them then that will pull them out of church.

I think a lot of that stems from seeing their children struggle with work and relationships and even their own broken homes. Grandparents are trying to fill the gap for their kids.

2. Retirement is fun! I have a couple in our church. They are retired university professors. In their younger days they planted churches, hosted home groups and built amazing relationships. Now that retirement has come they've told me, "We love the church, we love you, but if we're not there for a few weeks please don't worry about us—we're retired and we go places."

Again, I can't fault them for that, and they do a great job of keeping me connected to their activities and adventures through social media and email. They're also out visiting other churches and bringing ideas back. I even had them visit Castmember Church for me a few weeks ago, Carey. □

Great article as always. I really appreciate your insights.

Bret

Reply

Betsy Strain on February 27, 2015 at 1:20 pm

This is true in our church which has a large number of retirement age folks. Winters find them in Florida. Spring, summer and fall at the grandkids activities. But these folks are still engaged in ministries of the church.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 27, 2015 at 3:11 pm

Great point Betsy. There's our church and then there's THE church. ☐

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 27, 2015 at 3:12 pm

Bret...this is awesome. So glad they made it to Disney. And those are GREAT points.

Reply

confesshimaslord on February 26, 2015 at 4:30 pm

When the church positions itself as an entertainment venue in competition with sports, theme parks, the beach among others the church will always lose. The Church is a House of Worship. Not a place to come to be entertained by the musicians and pastor. I have heard sermons where 35 minutes of the 40 minute sermon sounded more like a stand up comedy routine. In a Church setting, God is the audience and the people are to be performing for HIM. Not the other way around. With the additional preaching of cheap grace that offers salvation without sanctification or any commitment to Christ or sacrifice for Christ this is what you get. Cheap

grace initially brings lots of people in to the church but is a self defeating false doctrine. Once someone prays that "sinner's Prayer", gets dunked in a tank of water and signs on the dotted line for that free fire insurance, they see being part of the local church as simply what you do when you have absolutely nothing else to do.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 26, 2015 at 8:37 pm

I think your take is a little cynical, but for sure, there are some shallow ministries. But ministries that pass themselves off as 'deep' aren't always more authentic. Genuine faith is what matters most. On that I'm sure we agree.

Reply

5 Ways to Embrace Infrequent Church Attenders (<http://www.churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/248845-5-ways-embrace-infrequent-church-attenders.html>) on February 25, 2015 at 11:03 am

[...] is Part 3 of a blog series on why even committed church attenders are attending church less often. Part 1 offers 10 reasons why people are attending church less often, and Part 2 features a podcast I did with Will Mancini exploring the trend in more detail. Part 4 [...]

Reply

Keith Sullivan on February 25, 2015 at 12:25 am

I think there is a hint of addressing the real issue in number 9. When people see church as a place to go/attend, the result will almost always be most of the people involved will be half hearted.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 25, 2015 at 7:10 am

So true Keith!

Reply

Jason Simmonds on February 24, 2015 at 1:55 pm

All 10 of these are in play where I pastor. Another one: People pick their small group/life group/missional community/accountability group/etc as their most treasured expression of church. I've heard it dozens of times: "The place I experience church is in my small group." That looks good to us pastor-types on paper until the person shows up less and less on Sundays, at which point we freak out and question the state of that person's soul. Many of the ways we've built-out and decentralized our churches has pulled people away from the Sunday gathering.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 25, 2015 at 7:10 am

Jason that's so true, which comes down to value and connection. People connect most where they see value, which makes us ask the question...why do people not see value in Sundays anymore? Fascinating question for leaders.

Reply

Nadrina on February 23, 2015 at 7:40 pm

It's so true about parents with kids in sports. A number of our "committed" leaders are showing up less and less because of unpredictable and demanding extra-curricular schedules with their children. What happens then is the parent not taking the child with activities starts to attend with their other kids less and whole families go missing for months at a time! It's really sad – and I think it requires a priority check.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 24, 2015 at 6:43 am

I think it's a shift we're all seeing. We want to see people attend, but I think ultimately the engaged will attend. We're seeing a bit of shakedown in the church as to who's in and who's out when it comes to the mission. Fascinating times we live in.

[Reply](#)

CNLP 24: Churchless: Why And How America is Learning to Live Without the Church—An Interview with David Kinnaman | Do You Really Believe? (<http://doyoureallybelieve.com/mashup/cnlp-24-churchless-why-and-how-america-is-learning-to-live-without-the-church-an-interview-with-david-kinnaman/>) on February 23, 2015 at 12:52 pm

[...] 10 Reasons Even Committed Church Attenders Are Attending Church Less Often [...]

[Reply](#)

February 2015 Archives - Carey Nieuwhof (<https://careynieuwhof.com/2015/02/episode24/>) on February 23, 2015 at 9:39 am

[...] 10 Reasons Even Committed Church Attenders Are Attending Church Less Often [...]

[Reply](#)

Mary on February 23, 2015 at 9:02 am

Thanks for this, Carey. I've read some of the comments that address reasons for non-attendance that are not included in your post, and I know these are valid. But your post has a focus on "committed church attenders," and what you are naming here is important. For years, much emphasis has been given to how we need to tweak worship to make it more appealing so people will come. This deserves our attention, to be sure. But what greatly concerns me as a pastor is the loss of emphasis in our church culture on honoring God as our

primary purpose for worship. I see growing evidence that worship as the worth we give our God is not an important value, even among church members. And I think in some ways, the church – with our eagerness to be market-driven – has contributed to this.

The marker on what it means to be a “faithful church member/attender” is moving down the scale, as your post indicates. Priorities are shifting, not just away from church attendance, but from worship of our God. As a church leader, I am far less interested in learning how to make worship more appealing than I am in having honest discussions about how the church can influence culture. What is God calling the church to do in the midst of a society where even the faithful place a low value on the act of worship?

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 23, 2015 at 9:08 am

Mary...this comment is a breath of fresh air. Thank you...so much.

Reply

Dan on February 23, 2015 at 8:08 am

I'd be curious to see how these trends reflect along cultural lines. Often times the “seismic shifts” in the church world more realistically mean in the Anglo church world. I have not done formal research but in my own experience many of these dynamics the Anglo church is engaging, such as less frequent regular attendance, are not always the case in ethnic or multicultural church settings as many of those communities are thriving

with a very healthy regular attendance. Perhaps it also has to do with cultural values. Anglos in the west have a much more natural inclination towards individualism where other cultures value the communal. I wouldn't be surprised if this plays a role when asking "What does attending church do for ME?"

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 23, 2015 at 8:54 am

Dan...you are totally right. I am caucasian and lead a suburban church. This post and much of my writing is based on that kind of context. I don't know inner city church or church culture outside of the Western World well enough to write on it. Just writing out of my context...which of course is somewhat more diverse than just while males. Clearly we have many women in our church and engaged in leadership and our ethnic mix reflects our community. We also pull from a wide demographic age wise and socio-economically in our community...but I write from my context. Thanks.

Reply

Marilyn on February 23, 2015 at 1:17 am

I have been working with my church's Spiritual Practices Team on a class on Christian Community. As my teaching partner and I prepared for the session on biblical and theological foundations of Christian community, it hit me (as I studied the resources) that what is missing from our sense of worship is the reality that everything we do in worship together is enacting of God's final plan for the world—that in worship we are the Kingdom of God, the Christ-centered community. But we are not teaching that well enough.

[Reply](#)

Bibijoy on February 23, 2015 at 12:11 am

Hi does meeting together have to be on a Sunday? I grew up going twice every Sunday, then Crusaders (Christian youth organisation now called Urban Saints) and youth group in the evening. I loved it but my friends and I had no connection with those outside Christian circles. That's not right either.

[Reply](#)

sam on February 22, 2015 at 4:41 pm

Poor ecclessiology. ... by author and non-attenders

[Reply](#)

kristiflea on February 22, 2015 at 3:55 pm

For me it is the volume of the worship set. So loud that I no longer attend. But, for my friend, it is volume in the other way. Small churches don't have hearing assistance for the sermon and therefore she is hearing less and less. There is a tipping point to both.

Blaine Newhouse on February 22, 2015 at 11:56 am

I have grieved watching this phenomenon over the past 25 years of parish ministry – especially as it relates to travel sports and clubs. Affluence and or leveraging limited resources in pursuit of some elusive dream is so disheartening when set alongside the call to pursue Christ's kingdom as our primary life objective. It is not difficult to agree with putting the things of Christ first in principle, but evangelical Christianity has too often divorced the call of Christ to deny the self, take up a cross and champion the cause of the poor and oppressed, from the primacy of being reconciled to Christ alone. Christianity has become consumeristic – what's in it for me – I need to be fed, instead of sacrificial – how can I serve and sacrifice for the cause of Christ and Kingdom. The former is not life giving and lacks any integrity such that a watching world would take notice or care. The latter has integrity and is winsome and attractive to a watching world longing to see in the church any transformational power or influence in our world. I remember attending a secular leadership conference many years ago and major league manager Sparky Anderson was one of the speakers. I don't recall much of what he said but I do recall very vividly the moment he paused and said, "now I have a word for all you parents chasing your kids around the country because you think doing so will make him the next Micky Mantle. Stop doing it! It's crazy what I see going on today! Let your kids be kids. 99% of whether a kid makes it in professional sports is God given ability and that ain't thing one you are going to do to change that!" This is a very difficult subject to address in the contemporary church because the issue is more emotional than intellectual. Intellectually, most people realize that chasing kids around the country tends to make them more self centered – believing that everything that really matters centers around them. We don't want kids to grow up thinking that, yet we feel this tremendous need to give them every opportunity. Emotionally, we feel anxious when others are doing all these clubs and travel teams and think we don't want our kids to miss out or get left behind. But what if we embraced values more akin to the kingdom? What if we made working with the poor a priority? What if we helped our kids appreciate that they are not the center of the universe – that

the majority of people in this world have so much less than we do and many need a champion to give voice to their oppression and struggle. If Christian parents were as committed to the inculcation of these values in the everyday reality of children, I don't believe kids and young people would be leaving the church or that families would not participating in worship as they are today. They would find in the church the kind of integrity and congruence that offers the abundant life that Jesus came both to model and to offer us all.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 22, 2015 at 3:42 pm

Some great points here (and I've always been a Sparky Anderson fan). Child-centered parenting produces self-centred children. Completely agree. And you're right, the message of the cross is self-denial, not self-indulgence.

Reply

Reasons For Attending Sunday Services Less Often » Sandy Matheson (<http://mathesonuk.com/2015/reasons-for-attending-sunday-services-less-often/>) on February 22, 2015 at 11:48 am

[...] This article is from Carey Nieuwhof and can be read here: 10 Reasons Even Committed Church Attenders Are Attending Church Less Often [...]

Reply

Yvonne on February 22, 2015 at 11:05 am

Overcommitted and Overworked. I am guilty (and I do feel guilty) of not being faithful to go to church every Sunday – sometimes I miss a month or more. It's just being darn tired. I work about 16 hours a day and I work in the evenings on Sunday too. As the sole provider for my family, it's important I stay in good standing at my job. Saturday is the only day I have to get extra rest and that includes all the household chores as well so typically I don't get much rest that day. Many times I stay up late on Saturday and just don't have the umph to get up to go to church. I know it's not good discipline on my part and I need to change that. But the thought of taking a shower, putting on make-up, doing my hair again for 6 out of 7 days a week makes me hit the alarm button and go back to sleep.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 22, 2015 at 3:39 pm

Yvonne...what a tough season of life. I feel for you. Sometimes I've seen the church rally around single parents or sole providers to help with a few of the practical things. I hope you find that kind of community. You're a hero...you know that? Sacrificing so that others (your kids) can benefit.

Reply

Tired of the Games on February 22, 2015 at 5:02 am

Also tired of pastors who spend years in school yet have the same or lower morals than many of the committed Christians in the congregation and no depth or knowlege (or love) of Scriptures and prayer – the 2 things that actually change the heart to draw the Spirit and love others. I'm 32 and tired of hearing the same Sunday school messages week after week after week. Some depth would be nice. If anyone reads their Bible they could whiz by most pastors... Quit trying to attract the unchurched. Church is where BELIEVERS are to gather to pray, worship, praise and be filled and taught and emboldened to go OUT to the unbelievers the rest of the time. It's not supposed to be a fun G-rated country club for non-Christians.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 22, 2015 at 6:35 am

I know a lot of pastors who sincerely seek God. Just be careful not to color all with the same brush. I'm sorry your experience has been so bad and you're so frustrated so young.

Reply



Philip Sawyer (<https://philipsawyer.wordpress.com>) on February 22, 2015 at 3:24 pm

I'm sorry, but I don't hear Tired talking about sincerity. In my own experience, it's about sacrifice and allowing God into your life in a way that's vulnerable and broken, so that you have something to share with also-broken people. That is what I've received from the most effective pastors or priests I've run across. Unfortunately, that's not what we allow our pastors to be, or do. They need to be good managers, marketers, and without any perceived flaws — or they're

not “good enough” to be our pastors.

And the trend towards making church unbeliever-friendly is toxic, too. It’s not a club for the saved, nor a “safe” feel-good place for “seekers”, but a hospital for those who know they need a physician. And that includes pastors. And, it’s a community dedicated to discipleship, which is what families should be, too. It feels like that challenge has long ago been considered by many to be too high a bar, hence, combined with the felt need to “bring in the masses”, the increasing dumbing down of Christianity. Hence, the lack of any felt need to be part of such a lukewarm programmatic thing.

Reply

Tired of the Games on February 22, 2015 at 4:59 am

Program, luxury buildings and pastors with nicer lifestyles than most of the congregation. Huge campaigns and ideas for raising money for nicer ‘country clubs’, er, I mean sanctuaries, but none of that for the poor, orphaned, widowed, distressed, outcast. Skewed priorities! I show up wanting to pray, worship and hear/feel God... to be filled with power for the tough secular-soaked week ahead. I want the Holy Spirit and desperation for God but it has been replaced with child-obsessed programming and guilt-tripped or shallow preaching – but make sure to open your wallet! Tired of all the age segregation and ignoring the elderly, childless, single, etc. I’m married but childless and quite frankly, tired of wasting my time ‘punching the clock’. My ‘bull’ meter is high, and it’s hard to stomach the smell. I stay home and pray and read my Bible for longer than a church service... God is who I seek. Not a pastor. Not a program. God.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 22, 2015 at 6:34 am

Glad you're seeking God, and agreed, a church should help you encounter Him, not stand in the way.

Reply



gwally on February 22, 2015 at 3:20 am

I would add the lack of women's visible involvement on the platform and in preaching. I can only take so many all-male Sunday services and then I have to take a break. Many women I know are simply dropping out all together over this issue and becoming part of the "dones". Fortunately, I've discovered the Wesleyan/Holiness stream of the church and there are at least 4 churches in this tradition in my immediate area – Nazarene, Free Methodist, Wesleyan, Assemblies of God, Vineyard. I'm headed to one of those next week!

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 22, 2015 at 6:33 am

Glad you've found some great churches nearby.

Reply



Dan Edelen on February 21, 2015 at 6:08 pm

When it became all the rage to replicate what the “fastest-growing” or “coolest” churches were doing, the Church as a whole in the U.S. lost credibility and fell into an authenticity black hole. Now we have to choose between a church with solid doctrine but poor community and a calculated marketability that smacks of fakeness OR a church with good community and a sense of authenticity but horrendous theology. There doesn’t seem to be much middle ground to choose from.

I will also argue against the contention that the middle class is becoming more affluent and has more disposable income. Every study I’ve read concludes the opposite. I think the crash of 2008 hurt the Church in America because many Americans wound up in financial straits and the Church said and did NOTHING about it. This left people thinking, “I’m on my own. No one, not even the Church, will help me.” No Church leader I know of successfully navigated this, and it continues to be a problem.

Also, I think people are looking for a genuine mark of the Holy Spirit moving in a church, but what they get instead is a show designed to make up for the fact that the Holy Spirit stopped showing up. These folks look at the Book of Acts and wonder how church today just doesn’t seem to align at all.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 21, 2015 at 8:07 pm

Dan...sounds like you've had some really bad experiences. I'm sorry. There are authentic communities of faith out there, even ones that operate as churches. The Holy Spirit is I think a little more present that we might think.

Reply



Dan Edelen on February 21, 2015 at 9:48 pm

I don't think my experiences have been bad. But I am concerned that the trends seem to be downward. Great churches DO exist; but they should be the norm. And keeping even those great ones great is a struggle.

Reply

Tamara Beatteay on February 21, 2015 at 6:08 pm

Marcus, isn't the church the people that attend it? So wouldn't change have to begin with the people who attend it?

Reply

When Churches Want a Pastor Who Can "Bring In Young Families" . . . | bm2driskell (<http://revjamesdriskellmdiv.com/2015/02/21/when-churches-want-a-pastor-who-can-bring-in-young-families/>) on February 21, 2015 at 4:19 pm

[...] of every kind are drawn to communities that are in touch with real life. For example, check out Carey Nieuwhof's recent post about why even committed Christians do not worship as regularly as they did in previous decades. [...]

Reply

Marcus Johnson on February 21, 2015 at 2:09 pm

How convenient that the writer came up with ten reasons that have little, or nothing, to do with the church body itself! No mention that college-educated church members are finding it increasingly hard to reconcile the church's presentation of the Word with their experience or academic foundational knowledge. No mention that people struggling with marginalized identities (e.g., LGBT, people of color, people with social disorders or mental disabilities, people struggling with addiction, etc.) or with loved ones who have those identities are becoming more aware that their church community has become an increasingly unsafe, insensitive, and insufficient place for worship and community. No mention that the church is so tied to the shifting trends of the culture it constantly condemns that many people assume they can find what the church offers somewhere else, and they're usually right. Nope, the problem is the family. It's the culture. It's anyone and anything other than the church. Got it.

Reply

EcoWoman1021 on February 21, 2015 at 2:43 pm

Seem to have lost my original comment somewhere in cyberspace. I am 67. Until 10 years ago, I attended church nearly every Sunday. I have been a church leader and have taught young people to love Jesus. My own love and awe for our Lord and God has grown.

But the church's silence in the face of growing social injustice has sickened me. People either belong to the Religious Right or they don't want to risk church splits. Our definition of the Good News is highly individualistic. We fail to recognize structural sin. We pray "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." But we think a soup kitchen is adequate. As Jeremiah says, we are the leaders who "dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious" and "say peace, peace when there is no peace." Yet we excoriate anyone who wants an abortion or lives peacefully with their gay partner.

I can no longer stomach church..

Reply

Marcus Johnson on February 21, 2015 at 5:18 pm

For what it's worth, I'm sorry, not only because of what you experienced, but because it sounds so much like what I have experienced as well. The church refuses to acknowledge that it as a body is its own cancer. Granted, I have found a few communities that are willing to acknowledge its own institutional sin, but they are so few and far between.

God be with you.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 21, 2015 at 8:04 pm

Thank you Marcus. I don't know what I can add to that. A very gracious reply.

Reply

EcoWoman1021 on February 21, 2015 at 9:26 pm

Thank you, Marcus.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 21, 2015 at 8:06 pm

Appreciate where you're coming from. I'm trying to address a narrower aspect of a wider problem. You can only cover so much in 1800 words. But that's for the comment.

Reply

Stew Hanniford on February 21, 2015 at 1:04 pm

I'd like to see the empirical work done to come to these conclusions. I'm not sure this would stand up to academic rigor. The one example I'll lay out is attendance. It is not an input, it is an output. I'm not sure anyone would argue that a church should focus on attendance for the sake of attendance. But increasing attendance is an example of doing a bunch of other things right. So focusing on attendance in that context becomes simply a objective measure of success. Likewise a declining attendance means that the church is not doing a bunch of things right. That could be do to focusing on just attendance, but it is more likely due to several other underlying issues.

At an objectively level how do you measure the success of a church in an objective way. As an example, a church I know highly values a certain aspect of their ministry and has done so for years. It is the most important aspect to a few core members and they define the success by how well that part of the ministry is doing. At the same time the attendance over the years has slowly dwindled to the point where the church is just holding on. Attendance numbers are the objective measure that perhaps that ministry is not really the key issue the core members think it is. By focusing on attendance, it becomes that alarm bell that something is astray. Then if the leadership focuses on the underlying causes of that decline a course correcting can be made before it is too late.

My analysis is no more empirical that this article but a proper look at the relationship between attendance and underlying issues to define those issues with a high correlation to attendance would be the proper way to get to the truth of it.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 22, 2015 at 6:36 am

Stew...I would encourage you to read some of the studies that have been done. Churchless by David Kinnaman and George Barna is a recent book in that area. There is some great empirical research in this area. A quick visit to <http://www.barna.org> (<http://www.barna.org>) will introduce you to much of it.

Reply

Dutiful Daughter on February 21, 2015 at 12:02 pm

Personally, I am now taking care of my father who is 87. I want my family to spend as much time with him as possible. He has trouble walking and even getting up from a sitting position. I don't want to leave him alone to struggle. He wants nothing to do with a nursing home. Personally, I do not blame him. We do say prayers every night and thank God for the many blessings he has given our family. Before my father came to stay with us, we attended church regularly.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 21, 2015 at 8:01 pm

God bless you for doing what you do. Thank you.

[Reply](#)

Uncle Benny on February 21, 2015 at 10:07 am

You left out what I think is another important reason. Most churches still insist that adherents assent to a certain set of beliefs, beliefs which an increasing number of people today find UNbelievable and even preposterous. The church has made itself irrelevant to such people. No one wants to address this issue because to do so risks offending the more traditional believers, who are shrinking in numbers.

[Reply](#)

Andrea on February 21, 2015 at 11:26 am

Wait.... you're saying that the church today still teaches the Bible as is?!?! And it's preposterous? Yikes-slippery theology there buddy.

[Reply](#)

Uncle Benny on February 21, 2015 at 12:01 pm

Not exactly. What I am saying is that many churches still insist that their members assent to a literal belief in Bible stories which a great many people today find preposterous. To wit: an all-powerful supernatural being created the world in six days, then decided he had made a big

mistake, so he destroyed it and all life within it, except for this one guy and his family who saved the animals in a gigantic ark, so that eventually his Son could be born to a virgin and would heal the sick and raise the dead and then die a horrible death on a cross but rise again from the dead and ascend to Heaven, and through his death we can all be saved from the mortal sin that was visited upon us by Adam and Eve, and one day (any day now!) that Son is going to return in glory to usher in a new heaven and a new Earth, while this loving God condemns the unfaithful to everlasting torment, but in the meantime we can also ascend to Heaven by believing in Him ...

Etc., etc. Yes, sorry to break the news to you, but some or all of this sounds pretty preposterous to a great many people today, and their numbers are increasing. So what I am suggesting is that until the church finds a way to make itself relevant to such people, it will continue to shrink and wither away.

Reply

EcoWoman1021 on February 21, 2015 at 2:52 pm

How many of the people writing Genesis understood quantum physics? And why does faith rise or fall on such things? Have we run out of sin that needs to be addressed and healed?

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 21, 2015 at 8:03 pm

Interesting thread for sure. I think what rubs at many is 'unthinking' Christianity. We are to love God with our heart, MIND, soul and strength. We often forget the mind. There actually are intelligent, thoughtful Christian viewpoints that span a range of positions on key questions. Accusations, defensiveness and name calling won't win the day. Prayerful, intelligent, respectful discussion might. I hope to foster that in our church and where I can. Orthodoxy is not incompatible with intelligence. In fact, thinking has led people both toward orthodoxy as well as away from it.

EcoWoman1021 on February 21, 2015 at 9:16 pm

Many legitimate viewpoints, yes, but all must be conformed to the mind of God. There are many ways to feed hungry people, but no Godly way to let them starve.

t

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 22, 2015 at 6:30 am

Agreed...conformed to the mind of God. That's what we all would love to see.

Lisa on February 21, 2015 at 8:24 pm

I 100 percent agree with you and to add to that we live in a very diverse world of many many types of religion and if you spend anytime with people raised with different religious backgrounds and cultures what you will find is that is isn't the written books each follow that make a belief system good it is the basic values that are important and if a church really wants to reach our ever changing population than it needs to start telling relevant stories to impart those core values like "treat others as you would like to be treated" "respect your elders" "help out those that need it, you may need it someday" "spend time with those that matter in your life, they are gone too soon" "never stop learning" be the best you can be" "respect the earth it gives you life" "love without conditions" "family is not defined by genetics

Reply

Uncle Benny on February 21, 2015 at 9:23 pm

Thank you! Very well said.

There is a minister in Toronto, ordained in the United Church of Canada, who is a self-avowed atheist, with a supportive congregation, whose stated position is that what counts is not our beliefs but how we live our lives. Gretta Vosper – look her up.

Andrea on February 22, 2015 at 10:46 am

Isn't that the beauty in the miraculous stories you deem preposterous? They are miracles! Ken Ham is a renowned scientist that is a Christian. He maintains that if you can't believe in the "6 days of creation" or of Noah's Ark, how can you believe that Christ rose from death? How can you say- everything in the bible is fiction *except" this part....? I understand it might sound ridiculous to non-believers, but this is a faith issue for believing Christians.

Reply

Uncle Benny on February 22, 2015 at 12:50 pm

First of all, Ken Ham is not a "renowned scientist." He is a young earth creationist. The two are incompatible.

And to answer your question, I don't believe that Christ rose from death, and I never said or implied that everything in the Bible is fiction. As someone once said, "The Bible is all true; some of it actually happened." There are many great truths to be found in the Bible, as in the foundational texts of most religions. However, it is a poor source for historical, biographical, or scientific truths.

You are more than welcome to believe whatever you want as a matter of faith, just don't try to convince me that there is some factual basis for it.

Keymooney on February 23, 2015 at 12:03 am

Each of has views. One of mine is that finding and accepting objective truth is vital to living as God designed for us. Another is that we are all vulnerable to — even inclined toward in our fallen nature — pride. May God's amazing grace and mercy be on us all as we accept and propound various ideas. If Jesus of Nazareth is actually fully God and fully man and lived as a man on the Earth two thousand years ago, then his life and teachings are inarguably the point. Our opinions and ideas wisely belong under the shadow of Truth — the Son of the living God — who one day will bring all things to light. On that day it is our humility — expressed through our trust in Jesus of Nazareth — that will remain after our omnipotent, holy, and loving Creator makes all things right through his perfect judgment that the Son promises is coming.

EcoWoman1021 on February 22, 2015 at 3:32 pm

Ooops! I'm going to try butting in here even though I hate this type of discussion. As I told one of my theology professors, If I'm ever locked in a den of lions, I want Daniel's story to be more than a nice idea. I've heard Ken Ham's argument in many different forms, I don't buy it. There is a vast world of difference between whether Jesus conquered death and whether those writing Genesis got everything factually right. How are you going to describe the creation of the world other than metaphorically? So, yes, I believe Jesus is risen from the dead — and more importantly, listens to me, leads me, and talks to me. Yup, I pick and choose. Seems to me that any sane person would. And, I maintain, I certainly don't know or understand everything.

Seth on February 28, 2015 at 12:09 am

Something worth considering. Jesus predicted His own death, burial and resurrection and pulled it off. He claimed to be God and John, the disciple...His best friend, told us that nothing was created without Him(Jesus).

Jesus referred to many of these “unbelievable” events from Biblical history as factual. He never corrected a single one.

Please be careful about picking and choosing when dealing with the Bible. The whole meta narrative brings us to Jesus and Jesus brings us to eternal life!

EcoWoman1021 on February 28, 2015 at 5:37 pm

Seth — this is why I hate these discussions. I am really pretty darn orthodox, more so than most theology students. I mean, God is God. What's to quibble about. I probably have more trouble on OT teachings on women which I relegate to the Jesus-is-going-to-have-to-explain-that-one- some-day category. I do believe two significant things, though. One: The teaching of the whole Bible has to be considered. So if one passage seems terribly out of step, I give priority to the whole of the message. Two: A lot of the things we quibble about are not that important. By that mean, belief or unbelief does not contribute one iota to whether we can have a relationship with Jesus and whether we can live our lives demonstrating God's character by the way we proclaim God's kingdom on earth. Right now, more than any other time in my life, Christians are turning themselves inside out over creation. Now there are some very important things about the beginning of Genesis. God created the world and everything in it. Creation is intrinsically good. Both male and female are made in God's image. More I'm sure I haven't mentioned. Salvation does not rest on one's specific interpretation. Nor does one's interpretation determine one's compassion toward the “least ones”

we are called to care for. This argument is a huge distraction that can even turn people away from Christianity because Christians look, pardon me, disconnected, uneducated, and emotionally unavailable. In a word, Christians like kooks. If Christians are going to look like kooks — which is sometimes called for— let us look stupid because we go out on a limb to care for those everyone knows are a lost cause! Be stupid enough to really believe in redemption.

Seth on February 28, 2015 at 6:07 pm

You are right. Christians are awful distracted in today's world and "side-arguments" are a big part of it. I can agree that redemption is the primary issue. I feel that the whole story explains the need for redemption. Besides, it is obvious when you see how good we are at destroying ourselves!

As an undergraduate with a degree in Biology I have seen the "leaps of faith" that scientists have to take to arrive at many of our conclusions and while I may question a young earth, design theory seems to be a very realistic approach. My awe of the universe is multiplied greatly when I consider that someone is holding it all together! Even greater awe that the "someone" knows me!

Thanks for replying back. Christ be with you as you journey through life!

EcoWoman1021 on February 28, 2015 at 10:07 pm

I share your awe.

Keymooney on February 22, 2015 at 12:31 pm

Paul the apostle writes in 1 Corinthians 15:17, "and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins." I contend that it is fundamental that a statement such as this must either be true or false and cannot be both. If it is true that Christ was actually resurrected from death, and it is this work that atoned for our sins, then choosing to change documented historical events into "stories" is misguided at best and evil at worst. What evidence does any detractor possess that Jesus did not rise from death? Is it valid evidence that miracles aren't true because they sound "preposterous"? Also, we should all be careful about agreeing with what "a great many people today" think and trust. Jesus was clear that the road to destruction is wide and the road to life is narrow. When a great many people hold a particular view, it may be time to take a closer look inside the heart.

[Reply](#)

EcoWoman1021 on February 21, 2015 at 2:50 pm

Think my son became an atheist because of that — he thinks one can't be a scientist and a Christian. There were other factors. Personally, I never tried to believe creation and evolution were totally mutually exclusive. Doesn't seem relevant to the power of Jesus on the cross..

[Reply](#)

Zee on February 21, 2015 at 9:12 am

I'm single in a large metropolitan area. I don't want to go to church often because it feels like most churches are for families and younger singles. I love my church service but I don't connect with many people there. So it's in and out. It's weird. So much easier some days to just each online. And if there is a series on marriage – please tell me again how helpful it's going to be for me to listen to it...

[Reply](#)

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 21, 2015 at 9:22 am

Thanks Zee. That's an issue for sure. I hope you can find a church with others in the age and stage you're in. Really do!

[Reply](#)

Zee on February 21, 2015 at 9:29 am

And it's not that they have to be in the same stage as me. Or the same age. I've been in groups before where there were married people, singles, older, younger – just not finding it and not sure why.

Anyway – your points rang true. Thanks, man.

[Reply](#)

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 21, 2015 at 9:31 am

Hang in there Zee. You're part of a movement that's changing the world. That's what the church has always done and will do in the future, despite the critics. ☐

[Reply](#)

Gina on February 21, 2015 at 12:37 pm

I'm with you Zee. I'm single and have worked with our youth at church and served on committees and in our women's ministry for the last ten years, and loved it. I was part of the 20% that do 80% of the work. But last year I had a wedding called off and lost my dad to cancer. I took a break from teaching because a parent wanted to teach. In the worst year of my life I realized I had no community in the church I grew up in. Maybe 3 people contacted me. I was invited to a young adult event then asked my age and then uninvited because I was a year or two older than what they wanted. So I quit going. I've visited other churches but haven't found a home.

Reply

Zee on February 22, 2015 at 2:49 am

Gina – it's community again. I was at a church like that before. For 26 years. They decided that they would assign what small group you attend by age & marriage status. That was the final straw for me (and others actually). I don't have a good answer, but I keep hoping that there is a church community somewhere for me. I keep hearing God call me back.

Linda on February 21, 2015 at 10:52 am

Zee, your comment really resonated with me. As a single and a lifelong church member, I have had some similar experiences. However, I have been fortunate to find churches (both in a large metropolitan area in the South, and now in small town Midwest) where I have been a full partner in the community without regard to my marital status. I did not realize how much of that “I’m single – I don’t fit the mold” was still with me until a few years ago. Our church has an Advent Family light the candle through the Sundays of advent. A few years ago, I was asked to light the Peace candle. I was thrilled and gave lots of thought to what I wanted to say. It was only afterward that I realized that I WAS AN ADVENT FAMILY! I love my church and the family that we are together. My hope for you is that you can find a place where you are similarly valued and loved.

Reply

Zee on February 22, 2015 at 2:42 am

Linda, I think you hit the nail on the proverbial head. I want to be part of a community. I’m not right now. When two family members passed in the last year & a half, no one in my church knew. Sent a prayer request. I’m sure they prayed. But there are others in that church that have community. I think that’s the maddening thing for me.

Reply

Andrea on February 21, 2015 at 9:08 am

I am one of your devoted Christians who finds herself attending church less. For me the symptom is “church family”. We’ve been attending this church for 3 years now, I’ve sung in th choir and volunteered at VBS- and I bet no one would notice if I quit church altogether. No one has invited my family to lunch or play date ... Ever. The only reason we keep going is because we do come away from the Message hearing from God. But it is a struggle every week. I think with over scheduled lives- people don’t invest in people anymore.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 21, 2015 at 9:21 am

Man, Andrea...Community is a huge issue...or the lack of it. Thanks for the information. Totally appreciate it. Hope your experience becomes better.

Reply

EcoWoman1021 on February 21, 2015 at 2:57 pm

Actually, my criticisms in my larger post still stand, but I believe we, as a culture, have become too busy and fragmented. Some people are holding down 3 jobs just to survive. We are not just economic beings. We have many more needs of connectedness and belonging. But it is very hard to make space for them. This is a place where the church needs to be far more counter cultural. Maybe regular “services” and “programs” aren’t the right format.

[Reply](#)

Marcia on February 21, 2015 at 11:17 pm

That's very unfortunate, Andrea. But my question is...after 3 years have you invited others to lunch or a play date? Since you are no longer new, are you now welcoming others and building community? Often times we complain about not being served or befriended. Instead we should seek to help the body improve on their weaknesses and show ourselves friendly first b

[Reply](#)

Suzy on February 22, 2015 at 5:25 am

The new people shouldn't be expected to do the inviting and welcoming... That's like hiring a new employee and expecting them to do the training and checking the first year. Or expecting a new girlfriend or wife to break the ice and make supper at the in-laws house instead of the other way around. Ridiculous.

[Reply](#)

Marcia on February 22, 2015 at 10:57 am

I didn't say that she should have done that as a new person. The people of the church dropped the ball. But they are human. Sinners saved by grace just like the rest of us. BUT, after three years of attendance and of being in the choir and the VBS team, she is no longer new. Now she should be helping the body fix a weakness. Jesus came to serve. Not to be served. Should we drive to be like him?

Reply

lisa on February 21, 2015 at 9:06 am

Thanks for posting this, Carey. Whether or not I happen to like these reasons, each one of them are represented among my church family, weekly. I would also echo @azuspeak in her observation about single people – while the same sentiment could be true for all church goers seeking community, I believe it is extra difficult for anyone coming into a building/service alone (single, spiritually single within a marriage, etc...) and leaving alone, week after week, to care if they return regularly. Another potential reason for attending a church less often is that some people actually attend more than one church. All kinds of reasons for this, too.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 21, 2015 at 9:22 am

Too true about coming alone and leaving alone. And yes, the two church thing is just weird to me. Many do it. It's the height of consumer Christianity. Don't get it. It's not about what you get out of church, it's about what you give.

[Reply](#)

38 Great Links for Leaders, Readers, and Creatives, February 21, 2015 (<http://brandonacox.com/links/2015-02-21/>) on February 21, 2015 at 8:18 am

[...] 10 Reasons Even Committed Church Attenders Are Attending Church Less Often, by Carey Nieuwhof [...]

[Reply](#)

Links I Like - JoshuaReich.org (<http://joshuareich.org/2015/02/21/links-i-like-33/>) on February 21, 2015 at 7:20 am

[...] 10 reasons people are attending church less. [...]

[Reply](#)

GB on February 21, 2015 at 4:52 am

Want to know why we don't attend sometimes? As a family we need a break from the pastors. We coach upwards, teach Sunday school, participate in leading youth group, sing on the worship team, volunteer for children's church, church work days, etc. That's just our family. And that's on top of two parents who work full time and have kids in after school activities who need to be run around. So we're both working around 50 hours a week and keeping up with our kids. And volunteering about 15 hrs per week for church (when you include prep time for Sunday school, practice for worship, as well as actual attendance, etc). My wife and I are each putting in over 65 hrs per week. Each. And now I have a pastoral staff who insists that "their 40" includes teaching Sunday school, going to a baseball game, planning a lesson, or just showing up for church on Sunday.

And they actually want more out of me? And they then sit their and say the reason my kids aren't in church on Sunday is because we chose sports over church? Hey reverend, got a big old plank in your eye. Might want to work on digging that out first.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 21, 2015 at 6:39 am

Sounds like you guys are overcommitted...wow. Sorry to hear that. This is one of the reasons our church keeps our ministry model as simple as we can. We want families at home with each other and out in the community, not at church 24/7. When we ask people to be at church (Sundays a few other key times), we want to gain as much as we can out of that hour. It's what has made being a double portable church more sustainable. I hope you guys find some rest...soon!

Reply

Anon on February 22, 2015 at 5:27 am

Have tried several churches with the same result. Best one yet: Prayer meeting's on my 'time off' says one pastor. Hey Einstein, we're all here on our time off... let's hope prayer's a priority to you, guess not.

Reply

azuspeak on February 21, 2015 at 2:15 am

It's interesting that a lot of these points are geared toward married people and families. I know several single people who are attending church less, myself included. As a matter of fact, none of my Christian friends attend church on a regular basis. I think it all boils down to one thing: if someone feels as if no one will care or notice if they don't show up for awhile, church becomes less of a priority. Unfortunately, many churches don't see building deep, genuine relationships as a priority.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 21, 2015 at 6:35 am

Good points. And yes, you're right. Relationships are key, and often people really struggle to find great ones in churches large and small. Thanks!

Reply

Rusty Woods on February 20, 2015 at 11:23 pm

I wonder if a significant shift in dual income parents, especially when young kids are involved, is a factor.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 21, 2015 at 6:35 am

Absolutely positive it is Rusty. I think it feeds #1-3. Thanks!

Reply

Henri Molenhuis (<http://henrimolenhuis.blogspot.ca/>) on February 20, 2015 at 10:29 pm

Having been part leadership of churches, been part of a para-church organization, (I dont miss the politics/postuing) I am attending a church where I can be in the background, attend less.... be in the Public/Social level of belonging to the church. I chose to do church this way, not being involved because I feel called to be amongst people/kids that really have no idea who God or Jesus is, looking and waiting for opportunities to bring God into the conversations that occur, and they always do. "Church" needs to/is evolving! Thanks for posting!

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 21, 2015 at 6:34 am

That's a great place to be Henri.

Reply

Emily on February 20, 2015 at 4:19 pm

I love attending church, but this weekend I am on a cruise ship from a company whose advertising states that there will be Catholic mass services from Ash Wednesday through Easter. But Guest Relations on this ship told me that there would be no priest aboard until Easter. I am disappointed.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 20, 2015 at 6:18 pm

Emily...this is awesome. I love your intention. I hope you get a cruise line with a pastor aboard next time. Good for you!

Reply

Jen on February 20, 2015 at 3:44 pm

If I make the effort to get my family to church, it's because my own faith was so incredibly well-nurtured throughout my childhood and adolescence and I want that for my own children. We've tried 7 different congregations in as many years, and have been consistently crestfallen when the programs and engagement for our kids at EVERY AGE, from infancy to preteens, have been half-assed babysitting and nothing like the outstanding Christian education I received. As a kid, everyone went to Sunday school: adults to an interactive

discussion/study, kids of all ages to their classes, for an hour. Then to worship, kids leaving service after a half-hour to go to kids church (singing and crafts, group games). Some folks only came for service as it suited them. This meant that church was a community, social, give and take event, something that nourished the spirit and was fun and engaging. Pastors and Christian educators had a two-hour window to really get into something. Now? If it won't fit into a 15 minute powerpoint, it doesn't make the cut, and I don't mean that as only a criticism of our Pastors—people don't come to church to learn and give and engage, they come to be entertained, to 'fit it in' to their week. You get out what you put in, and people aren't giving and prioritizing the celebration of their faith and their Father.

Reply

Rob on February 20, 2015 at 4:33 pm

Priorities... Amen

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 20, 2015 at 6:18 pm

So glad you had such a solid upbringing Jen. I pray your kids find the same. Appreciate your heart to make it awesome.

Reply

Marcia on February 21, 2015 at 12:46 am

As the wife of a pastor, maybe if more people would get on board, be committed and then SERVE in the church instead of expecting to be served in the manner in which they expect...then your kids would have more of a quality Christian Education. Everyone wants something but very few people will actually do something. Jesus was about serving others. He didn't go from town to town looking for what they could do for him. He came to serve and so should we.

Reply

Anon on February 22, 2015 at 5:28 am

Jesus-soaked Disney land. I'm growing tired of that being church as well. I have the depth and Bible knowledge and love for God I have because of the depth I was given growing up at REAL Sunday school etc.... not movies, crafts and ice cream.

Reply

Rob on February 20, 2015 at 2:42 pm

I have to say... Everything you listed are merely symptoms of the real problem. The problem isn't sports, money, options, lack of guilt, travel or blended families. The problem resides in the heart... Period. If we try to solve the problem by addressing symptoms... We will only mask the problem like giving someone with pneumonia cough syrup and expecting it to heal them. The issue is one of faith and devotion to Christ... Which resides in the heart. We live in a largely secularized Christian culture which values entertainment over sacrificial worship. Too many in the church are focused on what they can "get" out of it... Forgetting that our corporate worship is supposed to be about what we give... Its about God... Not us. And the church at large has done nothing to curb this reality... Rather it has largely fed and nurtured it. I once heard a man say... "What you catch them with... You will keep them with". If we draw them with entertainment... We will only keep them if our entertainment consistently bests their other "options." However, if you catch them with the Gospel... You will keep them because of the Gospel.

The issue with waining church attendance is an issue of the heart and faith. Once Christian leaders figure this out... We just might begin to see a revival.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 20, 2015 at 2:54 pm

Thanks Rob! I hope we do.

Reply

Anon on February 22, 2015 at 5:28 am

AMEN!

Reply



GMC3MOM (<http://www.genamccown.com>) on July 22, 2016 at 9:21 pm

I do believe there is something to be said about feeling wanted and valued in your church. If you don't feel part of the "family" of believers, it is easier to decide not to attend a service and find ways to worship and fellowship on your own. I think we have to bring back the "church family" feeling, where we are not attending church together but living together in community. We've lost the community feeling in the church, and if people don't feel part of the family... welcomed and valued... then they won't want to keep coming. I've watched people leave churches where they loved so much about the church, but left because they never felt like they belonged in the family. □

Reply

Ashley on February 20, 2015 at 2:37 pm

I agree with many of these. I also think it has to do with seasons of life. For example, we have 2 small boys, and often, between illnesses, sleep schedules, etc. it is difficult to get us all there. My husband and I often have to "switch" Sunday's, and rely on our bi-monthly community group meetings to make "church" happen.

That being said, I feel more connected to my community than ever before. Maybe it's because I recognize how precious that time is and try to get the most out of it? I know my overall "attendance" may not look like others may want it to, but it is by no means a reflection of spiritual life.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 20, 2015 at 2:54 pm

So glad you feel connected. That's awesome.

Reply

PastorAlex McGilvery on February 20, 2015 at 1:19 pm

One thing you don't mention, but is huge when it comes to church attendance is shift work. I live in a mining town so attendance is often dependent on what shift the parent is working at the mine, or the hospital or other 24/7 activity. In the city there are grocery stores that are open all the time. Shift work and often unpredictable schedules.

You talk about valuing engagement over attendance and that is important, but I value people over attendance. I want them to know that I hope they are blessed wherever they are. If they are sitting on a chair on the deck at the lake snoozing Sunday morning. I pray that they are blessed.

The other piece is that we have to stop expecting people to come to us to get fed. The whole worship attendance thing is about 'them' coming to 'us'. I spend as much time in the community as I spend preparing for worship. I attend meetings, suppers, children's games and recitals. If I have the slightest hope of my people thinking Sunday morning is important, then I have to show them that I think the rest of their week is just a valuable.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 20, 2015 at 2:13 pm

I think that's very true and I love your heart for your community. As your church grows, the pastor can't be everywhere, but to take the mission to the street with hundreds or even thousands of people is a great idea.

Reply

Kake on February 22, 2015 at 5:30 am

Yep. My husband works away 3 weeks of the month so we can have groceries and a roof over our heads. I don't get support, offers of help, etc. I get censure and 'how do you do that?', 'can't he find a job here', 'long distance marriages don't work', 'he's just in it for the money'. Yeah, b/c most people work for the fun of it. eye roll. Thanks for the help, support, and encouragement. ...and that's been several churches later.

[Reply](#)

PastorAlex McGilvery on February 22, 2015 at 11:48 am

I understand your frustration. My wife and I spent two years living in different cities. The traditional family structure is rapidly becoming the province of the wealthy as the rest of us make compromises in order to pay the bills and raise our kids. So yeah, long distance marriages can work, we're all in it for the money. ☐

Blessings, and I hope you find a place you are welcomed and supported.

[Reply](#)

andylie1 on February 20, 2015 at 12:59 pm

Great discussion and I appreciate your points. I find it true in my small church of about 150 — there are always sports or family events that many folks take priority over worshipping with the Body of Christ. I would argue that perhaps these people aren't that committed. I'm grateful, however for the families who actually have said that 11 am on Sunday is protected time and will tell others that they are unavailable then because of church and set that as a family boundary.

[Reply](#)

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 20, 2015 at 2:12 pm

I love the concept of Sunday morning as a family boundary. It has been for our family. I think that really communicates something.

Reply

andylie1 on February 21, 2015 at 1:46 am

Same with ours, Carey. In fact, about 3 years ago my son's little league team had practice on Sundays from 11 am to 2 pm — our church service is from 11 am to 1230 pm. I asked him what did he want to do....and he said that he wanted to be in church and then go to practice. Which is what he did all season. He also learned the cost of following Christ — he didnt play much but for the little league minimum number of innings. But he became an example for friends and others about his faith in Jesus, and I'm very proud of him for placing his faith above baseball!

Reply

Blessed on February 21, 2015 at 10:16 am

I think this post shows why there is less attendance and less families in the church today. The parents let the kids decide what they what to do. When I was growing up the parents set the priority of church and we went. (period). Children will often choose “activities” over church. I think this is why a lot of children do not know Bible basics and it is so hard to teach children (in Sunday School) when you have some who come from families who worship daily at home with their children and the ones who worship only on Sunday. We have people who “go to church” and then we have people who “are the visual church”. Young parents are needed to TEACH Sunday School...We still have 50 and 60 year olds doing the job because no one else will make the commitment.

Reply

andylie1 on February 22, 2015 at 10:12 pm

Blessed, there's definitely truth there about parents letting their kids decide but in my community I definitely see more parents choosing the activities rather than the kids. More of the kids I see want to be in church / Sunday School but the parents have set up sports or family gatherings that occur during the same time. I'm grateful that from a young age my wife and I have been able to show our kids the importance of worshipping Christ with our church family and that our kids have learned to enjoy it.

Last year when our local NFL team's playoff game coincided with our church service many families were missing. And while I'm as big a fan as others, my family was in church — I have a DVR and could watch it later! One woman came up to me surprised that I was in church knowing my fandom...but I responded, “Where else

would I be?”. She answered “You must be a better Christian than my family.”. I had to walk away because there was no answer I could give that wouldn’t make me look like a jerk.

church politics on February 20, 2015 at 12:43 pm

A reason you didn’t mention is how political I feel like some churches have become. The focus has shifted from ministry and community to combating or arguing against certain political and cultural shifts. I hate giving money to a collection, for example, when I know it goes to funding “causes” that don’t reflect my personal values. When a church engages in partisan bickering or posturing, it drives a lot of moderates away.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 20, 2015 at 12:50 pm

Great point. I like churches that stick to the mission of the church and define themselves by what they are for, not what they are against.

Reply

Mark on February 20, 2015 at 10:53 am

I would note that all 10 are about the attenders. I think for every one of the 10 there is a corollary about what the church has or has not done. This may have been in an earlier comment. I actually got here reading about my/your burnout and wont be reading all the comments.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 20, 2015 at 12:19 pm

Agreed. This post is about a narrow aspect of a wider subject. Best wishes with your burnout recovery mark!

Reply

Renee' Johnson on February 20, 2015 at 9:37 am

For myself, I grew up in the church, walked away from it, and have come back to it again the past 20 years, but I too struggle with wanting to go every week because people are friendly, but no one has time to be friends. They seem to like us until we have a crisis and then it's like you can rejoin the club when the crisis is over well I don't go to church to join a club, I go to "not forsake the fellowship of believers" and grow. My daughter refuses to go to church and that makes me sad, she says they are all hypocrites

[Reply](#)

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 20, 2015 at 12:20 pm

Renee...so glad you went back. Authentic community is hard, isn't it? I applaud you for continuing to try. I am amazed that at our church some of the deepest relationships people have formed are through people they've met in groups. sometimes it works. I hope you can find that!

[Reply](#)

Steve on February 20, 2015 at 9:30 am

I think an overarching reason for people's low church attendance is described by Jesus in Revelation 2:1-5. We are good at doing church and the things that God loves, but we have left our first love. Church is added into our list of idols (vacations, sports, entertainment, ME), and so it becomes one of many "priorities". Think about it, if we are married to our spouse (our love), and yet we show up only occasionally to spend time with them, do we really love them? If I have a week's worth of evenings committed to hockey practices, hockey games, Board meetings, and whatever else seems to be of the utmost importance, and yet have little or no time for my spouse, then my "love" for them looks pretty shallow. It is not enough to say "they know I love them, and they understand that I really need to do this".

Really, many churches fall into Revelation 3:15 as well, where they are lukewarm and not refreshing. They have the best of everything physically, and there is nothing that they need, yet spiritually they are dead!

What made the Acts 2 church vibrant? They had each other, and they relied on each other. They relied on Jesus Christ, their first love, and because they loved Jesus, they ministered to each other in His name. The church was not a socially acceptable organization back then, and as in countries where the church is still persecuted today, all they had was each other.

As Joshua Harris wrote in *Why Church Matters*, it is time to stop dating the church. It is time to commit to Jesus Christ as His bride.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 20, 2015 at 12:21 pm

Love for Christ and his church is very close to my heart Steve. Thanks.

Reply

hard working woman on February 19, 2015 at 8:18 pm

Traditionally, women in the family are the ones to gather up the kids and husband and organize going to church. When these women did not work in the past, this was a major social activity of the week. Times have changed. The majority of women now work, and are putting in more and more hours per week. Despite this, studies show they still do the majority of the childcare and housework. The women now have social connections to other adults at work. When you put this all together, the women have less time to attend

church. They simply do not have the time or energy on many weekends to encourage the family (and themselves) to go to church.

Society has changed, but the church has not changed with it.

Reply

Tina177 on February 20, 2015 at 2:45 am

Isn't it about time that men did their part of responsibility rather than trotting out the lame "things were better when women were tied to the house"? Attitudes like this mean you are driving people away, outdated and out of touch never mind falling attendance! I know what the research says but the churches role is to help address this as a cultural issue. Perhaps by promoting father and kids events, celebrating the equality between men and women changing male perceptions! Maybe if this was part of the message you'd ironically get more bums on seats as women may push their partners out the door on Sunday to hear this good news!

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 20, 2015 at 8:39 am

I think there's something to what you're saying Tina. If you get the men engaged, the benefit extends to the entire family...spiritually and practically. Thanks!

[Reply](#)

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 20, 2015 at 8:39 am

Thanks for the comment. I wished what you were saying wasn't true, but I think in many cases it is. I think churches that set themselves up to serve families in love will make a positive difference in the lives of many families and many moms. Thanks for this!

[Reply](#)

GMC3MOM (<http://www.genamccown.com>) on July 22, 2016 at 9:16 pm

I know of many churches where the Women's Ministries have been asked to stop doing weekend long retreats. The reasoning has been that when the women are not there for church Sunday morning, the husbands don't come and thus the children don't come. Instead of putting the responsibility on the men to step up when the women are gone, the women instead have to adjust their events. Not very fair.

[Reply](#)

full time working mom on February 20, 2015 at 12:39 pm

I completely agree with this comment. As a working mother to two young kids, if *I* don't lead the charge to go to church, then it does not happen. Sometimes....ok, most of the time...I am too tired to make it happen. In addition, Sunday morning is a wonderful opportunity to spend time with my kids, who I don't see much during the week. It's hard to dedicate that time to church. The last two times I took my kids to church, the priest used his sermon to lecture about church attendance. It doesn't inspire or refresh me like it used to. Maybe I need a new church....

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 20, 2015 at 12:46 pm

Maybe you do. ☐ Thanks for the honesty. So appreciate it!

Reply

Alyssa on February 20, 2015 at 6:53 pm

I totally agree with this. We LOVE our church—but there is no down time in our lives anymore and church is just one more thing we have to do these days. We try and go twice a month. It's 7pm right now. I just got done cooking dinner 2 minutes ago. I have been up since 6am running my behind off. Tomorrow is Saturday—there are swim lessons and chores to do. By the time Sunday gets here we are just exhausted with life and want to sit around at home and relax as much as possible. It's really hard to get going on our only day when we are all home.

[Reply](#)

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 20, 2015 at 7:31 pm

Alyssa I'm so sorry to hear that. I hope that you find the ability to simplify things. Cheering for you!

[Reply](#)

Blessed on February 21, 2015 at 10:26 am

Did you realize that you put Sunday as the last day of your week? Sunday is the FIRST day of the week. Think about starting out your work and busy week with your "Rest DAY" your day to FEAST on the WORD and make time for God your first priority. It is like starting out your workday without Breakfast.

[Reply](#)

Anon on February 22, 2015 at 5:32 am

Women are exhausted!

[Reply](#)

dalemason on February 19, 2015 at 6:25 pm

Carey, I love the reasons you give, they are dead on. Culture has definitely changed the mindset of Mr & Mrs or Mr or Miss church goer. Ray Deck 3, when he was with WOL, introduced me to something called the law of desire. The law says, "We do what we do because we want what we want." We read our Bible as much as we want to. We attend church as much as we want. We watch movies that do not glorify God because we want to indulge in... you get my point. When we want to find a way out, life is busy enough we can. As a youth pastor, introducing this law to our students and their parents has been great because it makes them think about their choices. Several have shared they ask the question, "Do I really want to do this, or do I want to follow God?" I know this is about church attendance, but several have used this as a gauge for their life. I think the law of desire is what you have flushed out in your post. First time reader, will be reading more.

Reply

Alex Miles on February 19, 2015 at 7:08 pm

This blog has been one of the best ministry resources for me in the past several years!

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 20, 2015 at 8:02 am

Alex...you made my day! ☐

Reply



Carolyn Clement on February 19, 2015 at 5:55 pm

Good post, Carey. I sing in the choir in my church, so I'm pretty much there every Sunday during the school year. In the summer, the choir has a couple of months off, and when any of the reasons stated in your post don't apply, my family usually attends the 5pm service (which has the added benefit of being shorter, too).

When we go to those summertime 5pm services, it's like an empathy exercise for me in understanding those who don't, or who rarely, come to church. We love the Lord, but we have jobs, teenagers, the dog, volunteering, and the pace is exhausting and relentless. I'm pretty sure our experience and fatigue are pretty standard fare.

And not setting an alarm one day a week? Beautiful! Lounging around in jammies while laughing with the family? Priceless. Not wearing shoes until after noon is bliss. I also like pancakes and mid-morning floury dance parties in the kitchen. And these things are family ministry and can't happen any other day of the week.

So when people stay home Sunday morning, I feel relief for them, that they get this opportunity to reconnect and relax. The question is, how can we be the Church for families in the midst of this frenetic pace? 52 Sunday morning worship opportunities isn't it.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 20, 2015 at 8:04 am

Carolyn...thanks for this comment. I agree that church is way more than Sunday morning. I know a lot of people who have made Saturday their relax day. If you think about it, our life is about choices. Often we let life happen to us, but we truly have as much or as little time off as we choose to have. My two cents. Glad you're loving the 5 p.m. time slot!

Reply

Chris on February 20, 2015 at 10:43 am

"We truly have as much or as little time off as we choose to have." Think about that though, because that is exactly the point. In your list, number 9 is to value engagement over attendance. Engagement is nice, but burnout is not. Often when church membership is declining those remaining have to "pick up the slack", and sometimes it feels like church is our second, part time job, not a place to refresh and renew ourselves for the coming week. You have basically just said, Sunday is not a day to relax, do it some other time. What does that say about church? That it's work and one more thing on the to-do list? If that is the case, then this is another reason why people realize they DO have a choice, and they choose to stay home.

Reply

Wynn on June 12, 2015 at 12:55 pm

My Mother was in Church everytime the church doors were opened. We would have had a much happier family if she had spent more time at home and less time in the pew.

Reply

Matt on February 19, 2015 at 5:50 pm

The reason our churches are declining is because people are recognizing that churches have reduced themselves to a business...that our pastors only "serve" in ministry as an occupation. What if we decided not to pay our pastors anymore? Would we see so many people applying for those big church positions? It's sad really. A church should be a place for the weak and broken, and not a place for the middle class....it fills me with a godly anger when the biggest donors tend to dictate how the service is run (how loud the music is, types of messages, who gets hired, etc) and a lot of us young adults over here are wondering why our church looks nothing like it did in the book of Acts. Stop trying to strategize and start loving people. People will recognize the love that is in you and will be drawn to it (Isaiah 60)... No one cares about your fancy books or your comforting sermons, people need something that is genuine, something that is real. And until then, our structured boxes of non-profit organizations will remain dormant and complacent like the hearts of it's people.

Reply

Keymooney on February 19, 2015 at 8:43 pm

Tremendous, Matt. You have stated what few people seem to understand. I stand with you on all of your statements. May HS continue to do what it takes to purify Jesus' Church so that the world has the opportunity to be reconciled to God through his people becoming actual disciples of Christ. We are blest to have people like you express the truths that you did!

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 20, 2015 at 8:02 am

Matt...sounds like there's a pain underneath your comments, and a cynicism. If you got hurt along the way...I'm so sorry man!

Reply

Ryan on February 19, 2015 at 4:29 pm

I work for a church as a youth director and perhaps I'm late to the conversation but I wonder how much the "Consumer Culture" (as my pastor and I call it when we reflect and think critically about ministry) has affected the ability for churches to maintain regular attendance. Even at 25 years old, I recognize myself sometimes

wanting what I want out of worship (music styles, prayers, etc.) when there's a fine line between relevant and worldly worship. Perhaps it would be different if our commitment to the Body of Christ was less about what we can receive and more about what we could give?

Reply

Keymooney on February 19, 2015 at 4:49 pm

So many are "committed to the Body of Christ" to receive what Jesus' Body cannot give. Jesus HIMSELF is all we need to receive anything and everything! Jesus will quench our thirst and fill our souls so that we are equipped to become givers by nature. We need to understand that he is not limited to giving himself to his people at "services." I argue that he wants to quench our thirst AT ALL TIMES. We need to learn to ENJOY his presence throughout the day. When the church gathers he will quench our thirst at that time also, but only because God uses ALL things/times/activities to feed us. What an amazing God to gives us all that we need through Jesus at all times!

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 20, 2015 at 8:01 am

With ya Ryan. We're going to talk about that a bit more in Monday's post. Thanks!

Reply

People make time for what they value most. If peop... | The Richard W. Hendricks Experience

(<http://www.richardwhendricks.com/people-make-time-for-what-they-value-most-if-peop/>) on February 19, 2015 at 4:24 pm

[...] make time for what they value most. If people don't make time for church...take note.
careynieuwhof.com/2015/02/10-rea... via [...]

Reply

Rach on February 19, 2015 at 11:43 am

Oh- this is definitely a conversation I want to follow! We attend a medium-ish sized traditional church. Recently several leadership positions have transitioned to young adults. While the church seems to recognize the need for changing of leadership, we, as young adults, are using this time to sit back a bit and watch. The former leadership is tired, worn out and not generating fresh ideas- and that's understandable! They've been in these rolls for 20, 30- some of them even 50 years!

We know that some change has to come to the traditional church- but what will it look like? How do you educate your church, help them grow, challenge them and encourage them in modern times? We want to keep the traditional feel. We don't want a concert on Sunday mornings- we're in agreement. But when attendance is declining, what are our other options for reaching people without just adding to their to do list? On the other hand, why do we- the church, feel guilty about asking people for 1-2 hours a week? I loved the comment about explaining WHY church is worth that time commitment. Really thought provoking.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 20, 2015 at 8:00 am

Welcome Rach! Man, you're asking the questions I love to talk about and explore. Welcome to the tribe.

Reply

Diana Marley on February 19, 2015 at 11:42 am

As a long time Christian I am just now ,after decades of letting dogma and doctrine stopping me from obeying Jesus's commandment to love one another, I am finding much joy in more fellowshiping with believers. But one thing continues to give me pause. When scripture says' how be it the most high dweller not in temples made with hands' . We still emphasize going to a building as 'Church'. Sadly when we had to fellowship and worship in a basement because of heating issues in the sanctuary, the worship leader somewhat nervously started off by saying ' I am sure God will meet us here'.

The thought that our youth have such a limited view of God's presence , does not bode well with reaching the world with the radical message of Christ's love.

Reply

Keymooney on February 19, 2015 at 4:11 pm

Thanking God for you and what he is doing in you, Diana! So many of today's organizational leaders continue to perpetuate an Old Covenant view and practice of following God. Repentance, particularly of fear and pride, are what is urgently needed by these leaders!!! They are leading Jesus' sheep back to the bondage of the Old Covenant. WE ARE THE EKKLESIA (CHURCH)! No one goes to ekklesia! God designed the Church to gather together for numerous reasons — we are certainly FREE to sing songs, listen to sermons, give our money/resources as Holy Spirit guides us, but we must wake up and stop teaching God's Rescued to go to church because he has not required it!! God's people will quite naturally gather regularly — without being commanded by organizational leaders to do so — because we are his body and that's what we do. Encouragement, meals, celebration, prayer, teaching, correction, serving one another, etc., are the natural (supernatural!) lifestyle and result of Jesus' disciples. Pressuring "Christians" to go to church is nonsense! Jesus summed up the New Covenant simply — love God and love the one in need around you. It saddens me to visit church organization services and hear leaders say that we are gathered to be in God's presence this morning!! I hear this all the time!! This teaching is subtly designed (by Evil) to teach congregants that the institution is NECESSARY for spiritual growth. Hogwash!! Holy Spirit is with us just as much — maybe even more — in the car on the way to an organizational service as he is in any service. May God's patience and mercy be on us as, I pray, we are awakened to these truths.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 20, 2015 at 8:00 am

Hey Diana. So glad for what you're experience. Just so you know, this isn't a post about God's presence. It's a post about what's happening on Sunday. God is much bigger than Sunday, but he's present on Sunday too. Hope that helps.

[Reply](#)

Gunslinger Steve on February 19, 2015 at 10:06 am

Our church recently went through a transformation with a new pastor... we (they) spent millions to remodel the sanctuary... in doing so they decreased the seating by probably 20%... took out perfectly good pews and replaced them with theater seats. At the same time they made a hard push to establish home groups... and eliminated the traditional sunday school and kids worship services for a blended, and more canned production. I worked with the children's ministry for years, and was phased out with the new program as they enlisted more teen volunteers. It just doesn't feel like church anymore. The FX kids service is nothing more than what they used to do... still out of a can... but now in a fancy new sanctuary. I walk into that sanctuary and feel like I'm on the set of a kids show featuring Jesus' clubhouse. Take out the seating, and encourage people to start home churches is not going to bring them in the building... meantime the other side of the building it falling apart. I've been going to the church a long time, I've seen several pastors come and go... I really like the new pastor, his message, his style... I don't like the way he seems to be steering the church... all show, no go. I'm not considering leaving the church... but I really don't enjoy going anymore... just really confused at the reasoning and where it's heading. (and btw... I'm only in my 40's in case i sound like one of the old timers talking about "back in my day")

[Reply](#)

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 20, 2015 at 7:59 am

Hey Steve...thanks for your honesty. Have you talked to him about it? That would be my advice. Sometimes it's just a gap in understand, or maybe he'll hear you and realize there's a gap he needs to fill.

[Reply](#)

5 Ways To Embrace Infrequent Church Attenders - Carey Nieuwhof (<https://careynieuwhof.com/2015/02/5-ways-to-embrace-infrequent-church-attenders/>) on February 19, 2015 at 8:29 am

[...] is Part 3 of a blog series on why even committed church attenders are attending church less often. Part 1 offers 10 reasons why people are attending church less often, and Part 2 features a podcast I did with Will Mancini exploring the trend in more detail. Part 4 [...]

[Reply](#)

10 Reasons Even Committed Church Attenders Are Attending Church Less Often | The Radio Revival (<http://www.theradiorevival.com/10-reasons-even-committed-church-attenders-are-attending-church-less-often/>) on February 19, 2015 at 6:53 am

[...] Courtesy of careynieuwhof.com/ [...]

[Reply](#)

When Churches Want a Pastor Who Can “Bring In Young Families” . . . | achurchforstarvingartists (<https://achurchforstarvingartists.wordpress.com/2015/02/19/when-churches-want-a-pastor-who-can-bring-in-young-families/>) ON February 19, 2015 at 6:00 am

[...] of every kind are drawn to communities that are in touch with real life. For example, check out Carey Nieuwhof's recent post about why even committed Christians do not worship as regularly as they did in previous decades. [...]

[Reply](#)

Mama Nahr on February 18, 2015 at 10:22 pm

I understand the value of engagement, but churches need to be mindful not to add to the frenetic busy-ness of life. So many people have overloaded schedules, and to add more expectations/demands on what limited time we have can be off-putting. Rarely do we skip church as a family, but when we do it is because we are actually practicing the sabbath we are commanded to keep. To have a day without demands on our time or energy is far more nourishing to us spiritually than scrambling to get everyone up, fed, dressed and out the door on time. We are far less likely to be in a worshipful state of mind, heart, and spirit after a crazy morning like that. I don't want my absence noticed because it mars my perfect attendance record or is contributing to overall declining attendance patterns. I want my absence noticed because my community of faith is incomplete without me and my gifts (spiritual, not just financial) there.

[Reply](#)

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 20, 2015 at 7:57 am

Great point. We keep our ministry simple and hopefully effective to allow people to live a life in the community...and at home. To be salt and light where they are.

[Reply](#)

Renee on February 18, 2015 at 8:41 pm

Awesome article! I am in a predicament over this situation and I completely identify with many of the points. My mother and I belong to the same church. After attending a service with her last year, it made me realize how much I missed going each Sunday. However, I haven't returned since. The people are great, the pastor is great, and their outreach services are awesome, but I don't feel a connection to the people (I should though because I worked as their childcare Director for 3 years). I'm in my early 30's, but 95% of the congregation is over 50. I could count the number of people in my age range on one hand! I've attended church with my boyfriend, but it's a megachurch and so impersonal. As the daughter of a preacher, I get the importance of going to church rather than looking online. It's really not the same. However, I also believe it's important to feel a connection with the church as well. I look forward to reading your next post!

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 18, 2015 at 9:03 pm

Love your heart Renee. Keep at it. What if you started something for millennials?

Reply

robin on February 18, 2015 at 7:38 pm

I know a couple that went to the same church for years and when they were in their sixties, they started missing church on Sundays. About half way through the year, they received a bill in the mail from their Church. That was so wrong!!! Needless to say, they no longer go to that or any other Church now!!!

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 18, 2015 at 7:43 pm

That's crazy...crazy awful. Ugh.

Reply

Diana Marley on February 18, 2015 at 5:11 pm

My hubby and I work opposite shifts, sundays are the only day we are not both working. Most times we make it to church, but this last Sunday he didn't feel well and I opted to stay home with him

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 18, 2015 at 6:11 pm

Work is a huge factor. Should have been on the list! Thanks for adding it.

Reply

A. G. Benson on February 18, 2015 at 12:06 pm

11. Aging Baby Boom population
12. Did you say TV/Computer/other media instead of gathering
13. Is there a Billy Graham in the house?

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 18, 2015 at 6:11 pm

true!

Reply

Barb on February 18, 2015 at 11:43 am

I've worked and/or worshipped in churches all of my 58 years. I agree with all of your 10 reasons but these reasons have been present for at least 20 years now. I'm deeply saddened by the trend and its increasing urgency. However, I find myself in the 'less attendance' category since I stopped pastoring two years ago. Part of that is due to healing from burnout. Another part is that I've had time to step back and reflect on my experience and it has been painful. Each of the congregations I've served as associate pastor have been led (or misled) by unhealthy pastors or as lead pastor, I've followed someone who disrupted the system in some way. Perhaps I've just had bad luck and I'm experiencing a small part of the Church, but I've seen the detrimental affects of poor leadership. Newcomers and old-timers pick up on the atmosphere of unhealthy systems. From your writings, it sounds like your church and your leadership have much to offer. Unfortunately there are places that this is just not so.

[Reply](#)

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 18, 2015 at 6:10 pm

Barb...thanks for sharing your story and thanks for being so honest. We're not perfect for sure, but I'm grateful to call our church home. We're learning. I wish your experience was unique, but it's not. I too hope for more healthy churches!

[Reply](#)

Aaron Fuller (<http://wrestlinginspiredfaith.wordpress.com/>) on February 18, 2015 at 9:33 am

It's interesting you mention the mission of the church, but then imply that participation is limited to Sundays – which would mean worship. I think that is the problem.....the assumption that worship is the singularly most important thing a Christian does. And I disagree with that, at least in the traditional sense. Worship is valuable in that it becomes an expression of the Christian community formed by God's mission. I think traditional forms of worship need to become more participatory and relevant – speaking into the reality of people's diverse lives. The “most segregated hour of the week” needs to become more missional into order to be integrated and diverse.

[Reply](#)

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 18, 2015 at 9:46 am

Thanks. I didn't mean to imply that at all Aaron. The mission is much bigger than Sunday but Sunday has become a flashpoint in the current conversation. Hence the post and discussion.

Reply

Aaron Fuller (<http://wrestlinginspiredfaith.wordpress.com/>) on February 18, 2015 at 9:51 am

Sorry, didn't mean to imply you were narrowly defining church. I just wonder – and this is within my own denomination and experience – are we (pastors and older generational leaders) falsely placing too much value and focus on Sunday morning worship? Is worship the singularly most important thing we do as church today?

I appreciate this post & discussion.....and it affirms, at least to me, that we have to move off Sunday morning as the most important hour of the church.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 18, 2015 at 9:53 am

No worries at all Aaron. Appreciate the discussion. I agree that we need to look at both/and not either/or. I think Sundays have tremendous possibility...especially for unchurched people. But they're changing for sure!

Reply

RFudge on February 18, 2015 at 9:07 am

I don't think people who really do love the church attend less except when they are prevented by circumstances or difficulties. We all choose to do what we want to do, and we who genuinely love the church want to be there every chance we can. Of course, I am a pastor, so I may see things differently from lay people.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 18, 2015 at 9:45 am

Thanks for this!

Reply

Prentice Durwood Worley on February 18, 2015 at 9:05 am

Here are the real reasons straight from the Bible:

2 Timothy 3 King James Version (KJV)

3 This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.

2 For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,

3 Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good,

4 Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;

5 Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

[Reply](#)

Guest on February 18, 2015 at 9:04 am

Here is the real reasons straight from the Bible:

2 Timothy 3 King James Version (KJV)

3 This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.

2 For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,

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4 Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;

5 Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

[Reply](#)

Frustrated on February 18, 2015 at 2:51 am

Great article! Some thoughts from my own experience and culled from my 29-34 year old offspring and their spouses.

Mom and I recently trudged thru finding a new church home and have been helping my young adult offspring find church homes in their cities.

All show, no meat

I agree about a seismic shift. Just as Napster changed buying records, and internet news on your phone has replaced newspapers, "churches" need to examine their effectiveness at telling the simple Gospel and disciplining those interested.

-they are all the same! Same songs, same Rick Warren/Rob Bell videos and small group guides, same praise team set up...same as how fast food franchises that have taken over every city, bumping out the interesting

Mom&Pop diners.

-worship consists of "song singing". I like singing, I like songs. Great to sing songs to or about God. But please don't call it worship.

-Walking out Dad asks "What do you think?" and the comments are about the drummer or the coffee. Never about the message.

-repetitious songs. Boring! I counted "he is faithful" repeated 36 times during one refrain. They never said who HE is.

-that same church droned on and on, repeat repeat for 35 minutes of music, without EVER using the words God, Jesus, Savior, Lord...nothin! Could easily have been singing about the atheist's Flying Spaghetti Monster.

-most are so loud even my 29-34 year old offspring were turned off. They said they could not hear themselves sing so they didn't. They just stood there. Each are accomplished musicians. What a waste. THEY said "boring". I have a degree in music and trained ears. At one service my phone app tuning meter showed an average of 112-114 decibels peaking at 117. AVERAGE! 115 is "standing next to a jet engine".

-another church even passed out ear plugs! because so many people complained about the volume.

-lack of high regard for God. Casual my Homeboy Jesus. Getting up to refill their coffee while the pastor is speaking was normal.

If "church" and Jesus are not "special" or at least held in high regard, what's the big deal to miss?

-Sermons that mention Narnia more than the Bible. Heart tugging examples like you see on Facebook rather than examples from Bible heroes.

-Online, one can hear or watch a great Bible based, informative, and challenging sermon in the comfort of his home. If the pastor talks too much about sin just click away to a different sermon (about Narnia!)

-more people are working on Sundays. All the stores, restaurants, and some factories are open. When I offered to help organize a Sat evening service designed for folks who must work on Sunday the response was "that's silly".

-for a outsider's comparison, check out "The Sunday Assembly" movement to meet, fellowship, inspire, support "All the things you like about church but without the religion". Morgan Spurlock's INSIDE MAN show included them in his show on religion. Very interesting.

Thanks for listening to my rant.

[Reply](#)

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 18, 2015 at 7:55 am

That's quite a rant. ☐ But I hear a good heart in it all. Thanks for not giving up on church even though it frustrates you.

I think you're touching on something we're talking about behind the scenes at Connexus where I lead. Imminence v. transcendence. God is both imminent and transcendent, and somehow our services need to usher people into both: a God who is imminent (near and relatable) and transcendent (utterly beyond us....mysterious). I think churches that do both well will do well in the future. Most churches do one well. I might blog about that at some point.

[Reply](#)

Christopher Herrmann on February 18, 2015 at 2:27 am

Thought-provoking article.

We have recently moved to a new community and church. The differences between the two locations (both in Sydney, Australia) – urban to suburban – is striking.

For us, attending an earlier (9am) service means that we have a lunchtime to intentionally use for the Gospel; whether lunch with neighbours, hospitality to fellow Christians, or whatever!

We don't (yet) have the "burden" of weekend sport to deal with so that's not an issue for us.

[Reply](#)

Katie Von Bora on February 17, 2015 at 11:35 pm

The fewer people who attend, the less community there is, so the less community there, the fewer people attend.

[Reply](#)

haggios (<http://www.facebook.com/haggios>) on February 17, 2015 at 11:08 pm

I am a struggling single mother who occasionally needs help from the church benevolence fund to pay my bills. Lately, it seems as if I am turned down when I ask for help, or worse yet, someone starts judging me. Mind you, I have regularly attended three separate churches in the past ten years, and one of these two things have happened at every church I attended. And no, I'm not perpetually asking for help. I am a regular tither, by the way. But at any rate, if you knew that if you asked for help, someone was either going to tell you they would not help you, or as in one case, imply that you are less than a moral person who deserves whatever happens to you, you would stop going too. It has been more than a year now. And even if I was able to get to church, which currently I am not, I would think long and hard before I trust any congregation with my spiritual growth again.

[Reply](#)

Randy Starkey (<http://randystarkey.com/>) on February 18, 2015 at 1:01 am

Don't withdraw. Dialog until you find a pastoral staff with their head screwed on straight. But withdrawal hurts only you. You'll just get bitter.

[Reply](#)

Aaron on February 17, 2015 at 10:25 pm

I have found in youth ministry and engaging parents that what used to be the center post of life taking place around church activities of any kind is no longer happening. This is probably connected to your point on Affluence. I have been a Pastors kid my whole life and now a youth and executive pastor and I agree also with the lack of guilt. What once made me second guess my weekly activities based on church or unchurched options as a child, I now find myself looking through the lense of convenience even as a pastor. I even ask myself is it worth the students or parents time when planning events, where as in the past I banked on if we plan it people want to show up. I think the guilt point is something that we cannot ignore because finding ways to help people discover "WHY" they follow Christ goes beyond the motivation of attendance to the issue of the heart. Great article, I look forward to the ones to come.

[Reply](#)

Matt on February 17, 2015 at 8:22 pm

Carey...good stuff...could an additional reason people who love the church are not attending as much be because they are trying to reach those who have found that being w/ their kids for sports activities on Sunday mornings or other optimal church times is a higher priority – not sure it is a big reason, but at least a positive one...Matt

[Reply](#)

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 17, 2015 at 8:24 pm

Love it Matt. That's exactly why we don't offer 'church sports' at our church. We want our families to engage the community. Great point!

Reply

Laurie on February 17, 2015 at 7:41 pm

I find myself exhausted by obligations and church is on the list. When I find my quiet time with God slipping I go to church to be reminded that he is the Great I Am and let the spirit wash over me again. Sometimes it's the phrase in a worship song or something in the message but I am once again made new. I find few connections with people at church but church helps me see others who need the same refreshing.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 17, 2015 at 8:16 pm

Love your heart for personal worship Laurie.

Reply

Scott Daves on February 17, 2015 at 7:38 pm

I think one of the biggest challenges is so many churches are pure milk these days, long gone are the days of substantive teaching. The church building is not really where we should have our primary worship and it should not just be feel good but should have some takeaway no matter your stage in your walk. For me, I attend more to connect with my friends and find myself less committed to attending the more i have the contact outside of church.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 17, 2015 at 8:16 pm

I agree that contact is critical...but there is some awesome preaching happening. Hope you find some.

Reply

sukhbat on February 17, 2015 at 7:37 pm

I think that one biggest reason is church no longer give real message of hope to people. People dissatisfied preachers word.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 17, 2015 at 8:15 pm

With some for sure. But there's much good being done by the church.

[Reply](#)

revdrjamesfouterjr (<http://revjamesfouterjr.blogspot.com>) on February 17, 2015 at 6:54 pm

Carey, my concern is that as folks in our culture continue sipping information, knowledge and wisdom rather than really digging deeper (with all kinds of info and understanding sources) the spiritual journey with a faith community loses more and more relevance. Engaging people in conversation takes time, listening, empathy and care. It takes a will to subvert the kinds of shorter and shorter attention spans of folks living in our present age.

[Reply](#)

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 17, 2015 at 8:15 pm

It sure does James. Long form thinking and conversation are endangered species.

[Reply](#)

john on February 17, 2015 at 6:08 pm

no truth in most messages ; not teaching sound doctrine ; not makeing disciples ; only feel good about me preaching ; etc

[Reply](#)

Keymooney on February 17, 2015 at 6:24 pm

Sadly too true.

Reply

Neil Paynter on February 17, 2015 at 4:50 pm

Our church is growing steadily after nearly being closed. The core group that remained was deeply committed. We are finding what helps most is to offer opportunities to deepen the Christian way of life, moving away from the once-a-week model. We are adding shorter, weekday, lay-led prayer services, as well as opportunities to serve needy communities. We seem to be attracting people who are excited to help create a religious community. In other words, we already lost all the members who weren't very engaged, and are building up a new membership of highly engaged persons.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 17, 2015 at 8:11 pm

Way to go Neil. That's awesome.

Reply

People Are Just Not In Church As Frequently | Presbyterian AFFIRM (<http://presaffirm.org.nz/people-are-just-not-in-church-as-frequently/>)
on February 17, 2015 at 4:41 pm

[...] 10 Reasons Even Committed Church Attenders Are Attending Church Less Often [...]

Reply

S Allen on February 17, 2015 at 3:59 pm

Don't forget people have to work on Sundays more so than they used to say 30 years ago. We recently had a member who got a job and she can't come at all on Sundays for a while.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 17, 2015 at 8:12 pm

Great point. Should be #11. We live in a 24/7 world.

Reply

Keymooney on February 17, 2015 at 3:54 pm

It is way past time for institutional “pastors” to actually trust Jesus to build HIS church. The ekklesia is who we are. We were never designed by God to be defined and to understand ourselves as meeting-centered. Disciples of Jesus (Luke description in Acts 2 is our model) were meant to live out a kingdom lifestyle as part of a community of disciples who do life together — with the purpose of MAKING DISCIPLES WHO MAKE DISCIPLES. Until institutional “leaders” repent of making institutions that they call “church,” the glorious Good News of the kingdom of God as brought by Jesus himself will continue to be distracted and hijacked by institutional “leaders.”

Let’s stop trying to persuade to come to “church.” Let’s start teaching the people who attend services that we have been wrong about how we have structured ourselves. Let’s see “pastors” retire from their occupations as “pastors” and start actually discipling men so that in time men will become disciple-making men.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 17, 2015 at 8:14 pm

Thanks for your comments. I appreciate the heart, but I’m not sure that’s biblical view. Paul certainly had a ministry that was sustained by the church as did others. And certainly with the size and impact the church has today a staff makes sense. But I agree we serve the church, not the other way around.

Reply

Keymooney on February 17, 2015 at 8:42 pm

Churches are certainly free to sustain ministers who are bringing the Good News to those who haven't heard it yet and who encourage and equip churches to mature in Christ (such as Paul). My point is that today's typical Christian is not being taught it is biblical that we ARE the church and church isn't a place that we go to. Acts 2 is a wonderful description by Luke of DAILY life as a community of Jesus' disciples. When are we going to stop trying to make growing organizations our goal and return to the biblical model of making disciples who make disciples? Meeting together to praise God and have leaders give instruction about how to walk with God is good and important, but sharing our daily lives together as God's church is clearly the model that scripture demonstrates.

Reply

Anon on February 22, 2015 at 5:37 am

No it's not Paul's view but Paul isn't our Lord and Saviour, is he? Many of us are Paul-Centered and NOT Jesus-Centered. And there in lies the problem! Keymooney is right and bang-on from Jesus' teachings. Question is: is modern church going to continue following Paul or Christ?

Reply

A Christian on February 17, 2015 at 3:07 pm

Too much time allocated to singing at the start of church services. The church service is too long and this demotivates lots of men. Some people could feel that churches are more concerned about singing than talking about God or actually sharing their time with another person.

[Reply](#)

A Fellow Christian on February 17, 2015 at 5:52 pm

I don't mind a significant amount of singing or even all singing in services.. it's what we do together as Christians – we praise the Lord for what he's done and is doing in our lives and we give honor and glory to Him. It is uplifting to the body. So you're telling God there's too much time allocated for singing? I imagine we'll sing forever in heaven. How glorious that will be! As for men, they aren't connecting at deeper levels with each other in the church and they need to. Many men – including church leaders – just merely “exist” on the surface when it comes to church – they are actually engaged in the world more than they are in the body of Christ and thus, missing out on the magnificent power of living in Christ and realizing their God-given purpose. Yet, they continue to attend to “do the right thing”, or “make the wife happy”, or whatever... unhappy and without peace on the inside. There are other deeper reasons beyond just long worship services as to why men aren't motivated and remain disengaged.

[Reply](#)

Shari on February 17, 2015 at 3:06 pm

Just thought I'd add the reasons my husband and I miss church sometimes as it might offer some insight. Traveling is one. Our family is scattered around the U.S. and weekends are the only time we have to visit. Second is exhaustion. He and I both work a lot and need a day to stay home sometimes and regroup (catch our breath). Third is to get to spend time with each other. We both have a strong relationship with the Lord and live that all week. We attend church to stay connected to a church family with all that entails, but we also feel the need at times to spend time connecting with one another after a busy week and go off for the weekend to do that. Church is very important to us and we love our pastors and church family, but we feel

that our relationship with each other, our health, and our family are also important. You are right Carey, the modern world we live in has a lot more options and church attendance is no longer viewed as a checkmark we have to put in our “get to heaven” book. It is just one part of our Christian walk in a very demanding fast-paced world.

Reply

Nick on February 17, 2015 at 1:38 pm

Hi Carey,
Thanks for this post and podcast. Right now I’m asking myself the very same question that you seek to answer.. This is good, and will force me to think outside of the box just a bit.

Reply

Jake on February 17, 2015 at 1:03 pm

I agree with some of these, but I can think of a few more reasons, but one comes to my mind quite violently. This kind of goes in a different direction, but it’s from my own personal journey and may be something to consider.

Pastors don’t preach from the Word as much anymore. The Bible is blunt, it’s soul piercing (sharper than any double edged sword), it can make the most robust Christian cower. In turn, it can be scary for the “new people” to hear because the truth hurts. The church’s mindset today is to attract the newcomers and that’s great, but they’re too scared to preach the truth straight from the Bible. The church is focused on giving more variety in

their coffee offerings, adding elements to a concert instead of sincere worship, and avoiding “off-putting” things like communion. No thanks, I’ll look elsewhere.

I’m 21 years old, was raised in the church, but didn’t give my life to Christ until later in high school. I’m looking for genuine truth. I used to attend church literally every week, but now it’s maybe 3 Sundays a month. I love my church, but the only reason I’m there is to connect with my brothers and sisters in Christ and to help out if I can. Worship is a concert and the preaching is merely a cute dance around the truth to avoid offending anyone. I’ve tried other places within the parameters of my beliefs, but this trend seems to be widespread. I’m sorry if I was too blunt and long winded, but I think this needs to be said more often. Peace and Love to all of you.

Reply

NPPaul on February 17, 2015 at 12:53 pm

God bless you Carey! Number 8 in your list is the sum and substance of your article. On the others, the party offering the alternative choice is explaining the benefits of their offering to people. All the churches I have attended assume everyone understands the benefits of attendance, participation, etc. in the church. Nobody should assume.

I come with credentials in the business world and public speaking world. The singular most important question that needs to immediately be answered in virtually all communication is: “WHY?” Why should I listen to today’s sermon? Why should I serve in the kids club? Why should I...

Assume the audience understands “why” and the speaker has lost! We need to stop losing for Christ. The first two or three sentences uttered need to be filled with why.

Nobody buys Coke, because its wet, brown and has bubbles. You won’t see these words in their promotion either. Coke is “cool”, “refreshing”, perhaps “invigorating”; all benefits and all found in their promotion. If we want to promote Christ, in our lives, in each others lives, and in the lives of those outside the church, it is high time we recognize Christ’s blessings, e.g., benefits.

Do you want to hear a sermon on: “We are studying the writings of Matthew and today we are on Matthew 10.” How about a sermon on “God has a plan for us to pursue family harmony, avoiding being hurt, while seeking the love we need?” I guess that depends on whether you want “wet, brown, and bubbles”.

For those ready to share the benefits/blessings of Christ, I encourage you to learn about persuasive communication.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 17, 2015 at 8:10 pm

Preach it NPaul....Preach it. Agree 100%.

Reply

NPaul on February 18, 2015 at 11:26 am

Can you guess why I asked to chair our Outreach, Missions and Evangelism Committee (OME)? ☐

I have a couple projects I am working on now, which will be implemented yesterday. (Forming a collection of promo leaflets that capture the features of our church; working title – Engaging with PCOM.) Once done, I am planning on sharing the concept with the chairs of OME committees from the area churches.

No longer are we going to hide the opportunities with the boring format: activity title, date, time. Yuck!

But Carey, I need to send you a copy too, because I think there may be a blog (or more) in it.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 18, 2015 at 4:38 pm

Sounds like a great plan NPoul...and I get that!

Reply

Kevin Smith on February 17, 2015 at 12:40 pm

I recently converted to Catholicism with my wife and children. We come from a Protestant Church that saw dwindling attendance. It was even worse on days when the favorite college team was playing out of state (could not get back in time for church). Catholics expect attendance as part of the requirement, and now at 52 I have come to understand why it is so important. Church is a community of faith. That community helps you grow, nourish, and sustain your faith. When we go now the church is packed, compared to the former protestant church we attended. It makes a big difference when there are a lot of people there. It just does. It

makes a difference in Sunday School for the kids to see other kids there, as it does for the adults as well. Perhaps guilt does not work. I just think we do not explain it well — the importance of regular attendance. I admit I used to drag myself to my former church, know it was a largely isolating experience that I did mostly out of obligation. Now I look forward to it. I bounce out of bed on Sundays instead of hauling myself out like I do for work. My thoughts.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 17, 2015 at 8:10 pm

Kevin...thanks. I am so happy for you that you've found an authentic community in which you connect with Jesus. That's amazing. □

Reply

Brandon Brasseau on June 13, 2015 at 8:02 am

I'm not sure I agree with every point made in this article, but I would like to comment on the one about guilt. I'm not sure your take on that one, whether you think "guilt" is a good reason to attend church or not. First of all, guilt should never be a motivating force for someone to attend church. God is more interested in the heart than whether or not someone is sitting in church on Sunday out of a sense of obligation. Sure, God can reach someone's heart in a church service no matter what got him there in the first

place, but if someone is attending church over and over again simply because he/she feels guilty over not attending then I'm sure it's not a good reason to be there. I have a female relative that stopped attending church but still loves God and wants to serve Him. Her reasons are: Years of being verbally abused by the pastor from the pulpit; publicly shamed and pointed at in sermon after sermon.

When she tried to meet with the pastor to ask if she had done something to offend him, his response was "Touch not God's annointed". The height of arrogance!! He would not give her ten minutes of his time, in spite of his verbal abuse and shaming her. She is going through a time of healing from the Lord and will return to a church when God tells her it's time, if he does. Meanwhile, most of the comments seem to be pointed at the members of the church, while not looking at the "log in (it's own) eye" These types of things happen in more churches than you think, although I'm sure there are many church leaders that truly have a heart for God. They seem however to be harder and harder to find.

Reply

Andrea (<http://www.andreaatwest.com>) on February 17, 2015 at 12:19 pm

Hi, Carey! Thanks so much for all your blogs/podcasts! I always learn so much and share it with the leaders in the faith community where I serve as the pastor. We are a church plant, four years old, two as a "chartered" mainline denomination church.

We seek to be a missional movement, worship in a local school, and TRY to exist so that we give ourselves away. We exist in an affluent community and our worship attendance is all over the board. The joke is we can

lose a "church" from Sunday to Sunday because attendance will fluctuate by 100 sometimes! A friend of mine planted a church about 60 miles east and sits in a very different community. His church is also missional but they serve the homeless, those without cars to get to the building, as you mention in the blog.

We compared our attendance on various Sundays and found that the attendance where I serve is vastly driven by the things you list in your blog: travel, sport engagements for children, the success (or lack thereof) of the local NFL team, the beautiful weather in the summer (they are on the lake). His attendance does not fluctuate with these factors.

As a young church, we have the opportunity to do things radically different so we do. We have a significant online presence and also from Memorial Day to Labor Day actually worship ON the lake. (Not the lakeshore – in the middle of the lake w/ a raft-up). These things have helped our worship engagement, but we still have many challenges ahead. I look forward to the upcoming blogs/podcasts! Thanks so much!

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 17, 2015 at 8:08 pm

Andrea...so great to meet you! Thanks for the encouraging word and thanks of having the heart to plant a church and experiment. The future belongs to people with faith like yours!

Reply

Andrea (<http://www.andreaatwest.com>) on February 18, 2015 at 9:46 am

Thanks! That means a lot coming from you because I believe you do have keen insight into what will keep “the church” alive . . . I appreciate it and I’ll hope you are correct!!! Else – it feels like an uphill and INSANE battle! ☐ Ha! Take care!

Reply

Jeff Eigenhuis on February 17, 2015 at 11:21 am

My wife and I have a long and varied history of attending and serving in churches...from start-ups to mega churches, we’ve had the privilege of serving in many capacities. But we have recently decided that it’s time for a change. In our early 50’s now, we have been overwhelmed with the idea that there must be more than what we’ve seen and/or experienced. If we serve the Almighty God of the universe, how is it that so many lives of believers and, by extension, churches are impotent? We are in the beginning stages of starting a simple church (or house church). The structure of the simple church lends itself to many of the ideals we seek in the institutional church: community and deeper relationships, accountability and participation, less financial stress and participatory giving. And we are going in with eyes wide open...not expecting paradise. Life is messy. So although we will still be attending church, it will not appear as such from a numbers point of view as we will not be showing up in any institutional churches Sunday morning head count.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 17, 2015 at 8:07 pm

Jeff...thanks again for using your real name. Appreciate your heart and I wish you and your wife well. It's so funny, but many of the big churches today started the way yours did...as a small group. As God blesses and provides, I wish you the very best. Love your heart for the church.

Reply

Juridicus on February 17, 2015 at 11:16 am

As we have become overwhelmed by the constant bombardment of ads, electronics, social media etcetera, we have lost the ability to sit, be quite and use our imaginations. In short, we have lost that quiet time to just be with ourselves and God. As we have lost that quiet time, we have also lost the ability to connect church with our daily lives.

When we lose the ability to connect our faith with our church, then church becomes less important. As church becomes less important, we inflate our own selves to the point where corporate worship is no longer necessary and we recreate God in our own images and proclaim we are spiritual but not religious. Without a congregation around us there is no one to lovingly correct our errors or to hold us accountable. Christianity is hard work, and we no longer value that work.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 17, 2015 at 8:06 pm

I think social media and technology as a whole can be used for good or evil. Hoping we can use it for good. ☐

[Reply](#)

Juridicus on February 18, 2015 at 1:47 pm

Carey, I agree that social media can be used for both good and evil. Your blog is certainly an example of how we can benefit from social media. My point was not that social media is evil but that we have allowed it to become intrusive. We need to be intentional about finding those quiet times with God. Without them, we lose sight of God and make Him into something we want Him to be rather than who He is. Thanks for generating a valuable discussion.

[Reply](#)

Counting Heads in Church | Pastor Greg Martin...Thoughts of a Nondenomescobaptitarian

(<https://pastorgregmartin.wordpress.com/2015/02/17/counting-heads-in-church/>) on February 17, 2015 at 11:13 am

[...] heads in church (even among the 'committed Christians'). I encourage you to read this before you continue. Please do so. [...]

[Reply](#)

BelgianFriar on February 17, 2015 at 11:13 am

I actually wonder if one of the core problems we have is property ownership and management. It's taken about 1,500 years, but the minute The Church started erecting and owning buildings, we ceased being a movement and started on a trajectory toward being institutions. Now we're unable to adequately respond to many of the 10 good reasons cited here because we are saddled with debt and/or exorbitant maintenance costs. Without the buildings, we'd be more flexible to respond to the rapidly changing culture. The problem isn't

that the culture has changed- it's that it's constantly changing at an ever increasingly rapid rate. Meanwhile most churches are anchored to buildings and property which prevent them from the flexibility and mobility (both financially and missionally) necessary to respond to the continuing cultural shifts.

Reply

Rhyss Leary on February 17, 2015 at 4:46 pm

Very keen insight. Thank you.

Reply

Keymooney on February 17, 2015 at 7:07 pm

Well stated. I am convinced that our institutions are generally begun and sustained by the "pastor." This occupation of "pastor" has been taught as the norm; WOE to those who are teaching and modelling this. The NT knows nothing of this occupation as the term pastor is mentioned only once in Ephesians 4). I will continue to call today's institutional "pastors" to repent and begin making disciples who will make disciples. I worked as a "pastor" for a few years but had to leave the organization (because of all the distractions, control, and pressure to keep the institution safe and "growing") so that I could live out my HS-given gift as a pastor to make disciples Jesus' way!!

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 17, 2015 at 8:05 pm

I appreciate the view and buildings for sure can be an albatross. They are means to an end, but not an end in themselves. We've been portable for 7 years but have outgrown what portable can do for us. But the building is a means to a greater end: to lead people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ. That's all it ever will be.

Reply

BelgianFriar on February 18, 2015 at 12:14 am

a means to an end indeed. and there does come a time when a good end necessitates that means, but we must be careful how we approach it. we must not mortgage flexibility and mobility. Our buildings, our ministry plans, and our staff and leadership structures must be mobile and flexible or this rapidly changing world will pass us by... as it already has for many.

Reply

Kirk T. on February 17, 2015 at 11:13 am

Hi Carey, my wife and I are both ministers in a Mainline denomination that is seeing these trends. Our main focus is working to make all church activity more engaging and beneficial to spiritual development, and we are slowly shifting long-held attitudes. A few weeks ago, she went back to her seminary for a week of study leave (she graduated in 2002), and went to the mid-week chapel service. When she was in seminary 14 years ago, the service was well-attended by the seminary students. But at the service she just attended, very few

seminary students were participating in mid-week chapel, and the seminary leaders she talked to were not sure why. Young seminary students not participating in worship with other like-minded students perhaps adds another dimension to the massive culture shift you discuss.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 17, 2015 at 8:03 pm

Kirk...thanks for this. That's a really great observation. I spoke a few weeks at Nebraska Christian College...totally impressed and blown away. Their 'chapel' was mandatory, but I was greeted by 150 students and pastors who drove hours to be there. They were super enthusiastic and excited for the future of the church. What I loved most is that the seminary focused on developing leaders who loved and were equipped to lead in the local church. Loved that place!

Reply

Melissa on February 17, 2015 at 10:54 am

I love church and go most Sundays (and Wednesdays to mid-week service), but honestly, sometimes church is like work. As a very engaged volunteer, my worship time is often, for lack of a better word, interrupted, by someone needing something from me. I love helping people, yet in the past couple of years I have stayed at home more on Sundays to simply "get a break".

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 17, 2015 at 8:01 pm

Melissa..man, I'm hearing a lot about volunteer burnout. I wrote about it here. I hope you can find some health and balance: <https://careynieuwhof.com/2014/11/7-questions-every-volunteer-asks/> (<https://careynieuwhof.com/2014/11/7-questions-every-volunteer-asks/>)

Reply

Alaba on February 17, 2015 at 9:49 am

What do you think in an aspect were a committed individual is deliberately stopped from engagement in the church. Many lies are been said concerning this individual and the pastor in charge takes up the issue without investigation or confirming with the individual. Several suspension have been given to this person on false allegations leveled against him.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 17, 2015 at 8:00 pm

I think it's really sad. Do you have someone in your context you can talk to about it...who can do something about it?

Reply

Alaba on February 17, 2015 at 11:22 pm

After many approaches, it was realized that the issue is more personal. The individual receives praises and recognition from members for his efforts; this was the major reason of his frequent attacks. He was even made not to perform his major duties in service. He later decided to leave the unit which these issues comes from. Subsequently, he was removed from another unit because he left the allegations prompting unit.

Reply

κ on February 17, 2015 at 9:00 am

Great article! I find with my church, as much as I love it, that I have difficulty connecting. Perhaps because I'm in my 30's and the demographic at my church are either older or younger, and there isn't a small group for my age. At my church, there is youth group, a group for young marrieds, women's group (the majority being older and married), men's group, and the singles group is 50's and up. So where does that put me as a mid-30 something female looking to connect with her age group? Perhaps you could do a blog on this subject?

Reply

Juridicus on February 17, 2015 at 11:17 am

K- perhaps there are others like you who long for companionship and fellowship. Have you tried to start a group at your congregation? You may be surprised where God leads when you step forth in faith.

Reply

Keymooney on February 17, 2015 at 7:42 pm

K — most of us can relate to your trouble connecting. I might offer a thought for your consideration. Connecting with people in our age group isn't the point. We mistakenly have been taught/adopted the idea that our "church" should be a place to connect (and with others who are like us, i.e., similar age, children, class, work, recreational activities, etc.). What has made the situation untenable is that we are being taught (and we have accepted) that we are to be part of a church for our own needs and benefits. The truth is that God has called us into his amazing kingdom for HIS purposes. It is God HIMSELF who will meet our needs and satisfy us beyond our wildest imaginations!! He WILL use others to love us for sure, but it is HIS design that we be the church so that through our love and ONENESS (see Jesus' prayer in John 17) the world would know that Jesus came from Father!! God's way of reaching those outside of Christ clearly includes how we love one another and live out our unity as God's family. May Holy Spirit's fellowship grow to become the thirst quencher that God designed him to be. When our thirst is quenched by God himself, we are free to serve those around us (fellow disciples, for sure!) and lay our lives down for them daily!! My prayer for you — I have just prayed for you — is that God will guide you to a few others who will unite with you to build God's kingdom through making disciples. May our generous God provide spiritual leaders who will disciple you into people who become disciple makers as Jesus both modeled and instructed us to (Matthew 28).

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 17, 2015 at 7:59 pm

K...hope you can connect with a small group...I think the advice to start one is good advice.

Reply

Tom on February 17, 2015 at 7:17 am

Carey, thank you very much for this post. I serve at a fairly affluent 1,500-member church that averages around 700 on Sundays, and our staff have been racking our brains over this issue. This post was a nice bit of reassurance that the church itself probably isn't the problem, but we still need to adjust our approach to address this. I'll be sending this around to our staff.

Jumping topics a bit, the longer I spend in large church ministry, the more I'm questioning its sustainability. These massive youth and children's programs require so many hours of intense labor (especially from volunteers), and I see so many people dissatisfied and burned out. Some of the comments on this post have gotten me thinking: Could inconsistent attendance and volunteer burnout be somewhat related issues? Could the streamlining of programs to be less demanding on volunteers be one way to help people see the church as a place to refresh and not just a second workplace? Would appreciate your thoughts.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 17, 2015 at 7:58 pm

Tom...thanks for sharing your real name (so many don't), and thanks for being so honest. Makes me want to hang out with you.

I think sustainability is an issue for sure. That's why I'm a fan of what Rich Birch calls quicker lighter footprints. Portable campuses, smaller campuses that cost less to launch, are smaller and more flexible. I think for most of us that's a viable option. It expands the mission but doesn't commit churches to millions of dollars each time an expansion is required.

As to volunteer burnout, I wonder if that's a sign of culture more than size. Frank Bealer had some great things to say about creating a great volunteer culture in Episode 20 of my Leadership Podcast. <https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/cnlp-20-how-to-get-volunteers/id912753163?i=334173407&mt=2> (<https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/cnlp-20-how-to-get-volunteers/id912753163?i=334173407&mt=2>)

Reply



GMC3MOM (<http://www.genamccown.com>) on July 22, 2016 at 9:29 pm

Could there not be something to be said about intentional equipping of our body, so we are not relying on 10% to do 90% of the work? Not only helping people figure out their spiritual gifts but then helping them plug those gifts into the body? When we feel like we are apart of something bigger than ourselves, we want to see it through to fruition. Are we micromanaging? Are we not thinking big enough? Are we squelching what the Holy Spirit could do by putting man made limitations based on what we think we can handle?

Are we providing opportunities to develop more leaders vs. just waiting for them to volunteer?

Reply

brittney kennedy on February 17, 2015 at 7:13 am

Wow..I dont know how I feel about this article. Too be honest one side of me feels like too much emphasis is put on the numbers bc the numbers mean money, and weather anyone cares to admit it money is a big part of church. And that is ok and understandable.

My concern is this, if church attendance numbers are dwindling then why are pastors and active members sitting still and waiting? The reason WHY the numbers are decreasing shouldnt be the question. Why is there less and less outreach going on from the church to show these communties what its about?

Cast your net to catch fish right?

Instead of the why, we need to think how!

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 17, 2015 at 7:55 pm

I agree Brittney...there's an urgency here for sure.

Reply

CNLP 23: Why People Are Attending Church Less Often And How to Respond—An Interview with Will Mancini - Carey Nieuwhof

(<https://careynieuwhof.com/2015/02/episode23/>) on February 17, 2015 at 12:07 am

[...] One trend almost every church leader is talking about today: people who attend church are attending less often. I started a series on the subject yesterday, outlining 10 reasons why even committed church attenders are attending church less often. [...]

[Reply](#)

Carey Nieuwhof: “Ten Reasons Even Committed Church Attenders Are Attending Church Less Often” | Elevate Christian Network Blog (<https://elevatechristiannetworkblog.wordpress.com/2015/02/16/carey-nieuwhof-ten-reasons-even-committed-church-attenders-are-attending-church-less-often/>) on February 17, 2015 at 12:00 am

[...] Source: careynieuwhof.com [...]

[Reply](#)

Kevin M on February 16, 2015 at 7:17 pm

I wonder how much Jesus cared/cares about this question... I think the Pharisees would have been concerned about for sure... how about Jesus?

[Reply](#)

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 17, 2015 at 6:10 am

I think Jesus cares very much about this question. The church as we know it isn't a perfect reflection of Christ's intention, but he's very much alive and active in much of it. When the church suffers or is rendered less effective, Christ cares very much.

[Reply](#)

Chris Simon on February 17, 2015 at 2:11 pm

Modern church goers think too much of themselves. The Ekklesia of God does not hinge on church attendance or man's institutional expression of church. I think Jesus would care for the inverse and would be happy that less believers get entrenched in the religious institutions on a weekly basis. The church system man has invented and built Temples for is not the Ekklesia of New Testament scripture. Today's church is akin to the religious Pharisees Jesus rebuked. Man's tradition of going to church is not God's Ekklesia, but just more worldly trappings to stumble through.

Reply

Kevin Smith on February 17, 2015 at 1:01 pm

I like this from a Catholic Priest: "The Church is doing its job if it becomes a place where sinners can go to receive forgiveness and grace. The good people who don't go to church are undoubtedly receiving God's grace by a different "channel" or route. We don't know what is going on in any person's heart and we can only judge our own self in how responsive we are to living out God's invitation to be a faithful, hopeful and loving person." We go because God said Keep Holy the Sabbath and Jesus said "Do this in remembrance of me." and the word "assembly" is used often in the Old Testament. The Early Christians met often to perform mass and listen to scripture readings. It is a way to replenish the soul. That is the purpose for going... the purpose for the institution itself (think of it as a homeless shelter and soup kitchen for the soul, although many today would rather close than turn their churches into this). If one is going out of guilt it is probably the wrong reason.

Reply

Todd on February 16, 2015 at 7:04 pm

I completely agree with #8 and the lack of value. Twenty years ago, the church provided something to occupy families. Today's church must compete.

Time has become a rare commodity for families, and they seek to maximize value. How can the church demonstrate value?

The value used to be knowledge and learning which is now perhaps even better online.

The true value is accountability and challenging personal growth. How is the church today meeting this for families?

Reply

Michael on February 16, 2015 at 5:05 pm

I attend a very cutting edge church and I believe we lose people because the set up, tear down, volunteering of care and welcome ministries, and volunteering of family ministry looks exhausting to them.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 16, 2015 at 5:07 pm

Wow. That's interesting. I lead a very volunteer intensive church plant and often people get inspired by how our volunteers serve. It's actually an attraction point for many. Wonder what the difference is?

Reply

Henry Imler (<http://henryiml.com/>) on February 16, 2015 at 10:21 pm

A significant number of my friends have been attracted (initially) to volunteering at church plants, established churches, and para-church organizations.

I'm always excited when they finally leave because they start treating themselves as people. I can't tell you how many people my wife and I have cared for as they realize what burnt-out husks their lives have become, in large part because of all of the work they asked to do with the little free time they have. They are bled dry by the church and die they do.

The burn-out can last varying amounts of time. Some come back to the orgs and repeat the cycle, some re-enter healthily, and some never come back (retaining or losing or their faith).

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 17, 2015 at 6:09 am

Henry that sounds terrible. I'm so sorry to hear that. I think volunteering can be a very positive experience and I'm sorry that's not always the case. It's tragic when the dynamic is bad enough that others get excited when people leave. Clearly not what Christ intended nor the case for many churches.

Reply

Henry Imler (<http://henryiml.com/>) on February 22, 2015 at 6:34 pm

It certainly is tragic! But I'm more focused on the good of the people in front of me than on things beyond my control.

Volunteering with healthy boundaries and healthy margins can be fantastic.

But I've seen more and more churches with a business mindset look at volunteering as a surplus as cheap labor and they "lead" in such a way as to extract as much free labor from the pool of volunteers as possible with no real understanding of healthy boundaries or margin in the volunteer's lives.

MrsBlah on February 16, 2015 at 3:46 pm

I wonder, too, if the loss of the community village or the mentality of the community village affects attendance. As a parent of young children, I find it a huge effort to get out the door for church and deal the potential consequences of coming out. There may be programs but if my kids need their nap or service runs late and as a result, we have hungry grumpy children, I'd rather stay at home and do church another way instead of going out yet again only to have the rest of my day skewed and stressed. I feel like we're left alone to deal with the consequences of timing colliding with our kids' needs (not wants, but needs). Having been in leadership, however, I know it's hard to have an answer. And having said the above, we do try to attend church, but definitely not as often as I would like due to the reasons above.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 16, 2015 at 3:55 pm

Thanks so much for your honesty...and for sure, I think a lot of parents can relate to that. Interestingly enough, one of my questions is what's shifted in 30 years? I think more often in the past, more parents used to come...and now it seems more overwhelming than ever before. I wonder what's driving that? Any thoughts? Thanks again for the comment!

Reply

Dickie on February 17, 2015 at 10:44 am

I think your answer is "who's running the ship?" Thirty years ago parents were in charge, for the most case. Now everything is geared to what the child wants and the fear of being seen as a bad parent if your child is not in charge. The parents are conforming to what the child wants rather than teaching the child that life is not about them. are conforming to what the child wants rather than teaching the child that life is not about them.

Reply

MrsBlah on February 17, 2015 at 2:28 pm

If my kids were older, I'd say that is my issue, but since my kids are younger and have more needs, it's not letting them dictate so much as ensuring I am responsibly meeting their needs. As a pastor, however, I have seen more parents allowing their children's interests take over on weekends and letting church be another extra-curricular, which I still can't agree with, having become a parent since then.

Reply

MrsBlah on February 17, 2015 at 2:25 pm

Thanks for your reply Carey. I think there are many factors, but that may just be the way I see "greys" in everything. Part of it may be "ignorance is bliss"; if I didn't know that naps were good for my infant and toddler, I wouldn't care so much that they didn't nap well on Sundays. My preschooler is fine on Sundays because he doesn't need the sleep during the day. We found a great difference in our children when they are well-napped! Some may say just to trust God will take of things, but I think that's doing a disservice to the blessings and responsibilities God has given us with these children. Of course, not everyone has my perspective. And part of it for me, personally, is that I'm sorting out a lot of things with my relationship with God and it's been emotionally difficult for me to make the effort. If it weren't for my kids I honestly would take a sabbatical from church! But that's just me, and I'm still exploring what's going on about this.

I do know of other parents, however, who feel overwhelmed when they are managing their newborn and instead of having the community/church walk beside them, which I believe came naturally 30 years ago, are feeling protective when programs insist of separating parent and child, and services don't accommodate parents bringing their babies into the sanctuary. I've loved services which see their congregation more wholistically than only for those 13 yrs and up, or 18 yrs and up. The "family" of God is becoming increasingly segregated with more targeted programs. which can be a blessing and a curse. Of course, parents are equipped with more knowledge than before and sometimes refuse help from the community, but in any case now there is no one to even offer to walk beside a new parent. I'm not talking about hand-holding, but coming alongside in life with.

Reply

Robin Jordan on February 16, 2015 at 3:00 pm

Churches were at one time a major hub of direct, face to face social contact. People attended church to get their needs for interpersonal interaction met as much as they did to get their spiritual needs met. Now we have social media providing a convenient substitute for face to face social contact as well as other social gatherings where people can meet face to face.

People also appear to not value direct, face to face social contact as they once did. As a retired social worker I am convinced that our increasing reliance on social media is not a healthy development from a psycho-social and existential point of view but we have not yet realized it.

One of the reasons that I regularly attend my church is that it enables me to stay plugged into an important social support system. Other folks may not recognize its importance, may have alternative social support systems, or see social media as a social support system. However, social media has its limitations as a social support system. Someone living two states away from you may be able to offer you encouragement but they are not going drive several hundred miles to take you to a doctor when your car breaks down.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 16, 2015 at 3:05 pm

Thanks Robin...that's a really good point. Community in real life is different than community online. Both are meaningful, but face to face has a level to it that is very deep.

Reply

JAJ on February 17, 2015 at 10:25 am

I thought all the points were pertinent and I also feel that the work world is much more 24/7 for many. The world of retail, service industries, care work and entertainment schedules leave very view of our parishioners in the M-F, 8-5 world.

Reply

10 Reasons Even Committed Church Attenders Are Attending Church Less Often | Do You Really Believe?

(<http://doyoureallybelieve.com/mashup/10-reasons-even-committed-church-attenders-are-attending-church-less-often/>) on February 16, 2015 at 12:52 pm

[...] By Carey [...]

Reply

Ron Mabry on February 16, 2015 at 11:35 am

Carey, I think your ten reasons are mostly correct. Here comes the but; but your first point about increasing affluence is true, I think, for the affluent. However, the average worker in the U.S. has seen a ten percent drop in buying power since 2000. Some stay away because they no longer feel they can contribute.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 16, 2015 at 11:56 am

Ron...Thanks for this. I think you're right...yet if you drill down a little further into the data you'll see that more people also have access to money than before. Because so many churches have a suburban context...it explains what many leaders might be seeing. Churches in older or less affluent communities would see what you describe. And it's a shame when people stay away because they feel they can't contribute.

Reply

Chuck on February 16, 2015 at 10:32 am

Hi Carey, love your writings. Very thought provoking. I would add two more...

1. Obviously for years we have seen a drastic decline in our 18-30 year old crowd. The church has not done a good job of attracting and engaging this group. And where in the past, this group would get married and have kids and return to church, We are seeing a decline in their return.

2. Empty nesters- we have done a good job of reaching children and youth and many times that means we have the parents as well. But...when the kid graduates or moves away we are seeing a drastic decline in those parents attendance. They are not being engaged and they are drifting.

Our church is 8 years old and we are now over 1200 and have one multi site church. With all the growth it kills me as a pastor to see those I love drift and stop attending. I'm currently working on a strategy but it can be downright frustrating.

Keep up the good work.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 16, 2015 at 11:12 am

Chuck...thanks for the encouragement. Two great points here. And that's amazing growth for 8 years. Wow!

Reply

Marie on February 16, 2015 at 2:21 pm

I have a 22 year old that lives in New York City and a 19 year old in the south, and both state that there are few in their age group active in church. The demographics that the attention of the church in America focuses on is families with kids/youth. Singles not in a serious relationship can feel marginalized.

Reply

Carey Nieuwhof (<http://www.careynieuwhof.com/>) on February 16, 2015 at 2:23 pm

Sorry to hear that Marie. Hillsong NYC, Redeemer Presbyterian NYC and Liquid Church in NJ do an awesome job of engaging singles. Hopefully your 22 year old can connect with one of those churches.

Reply

Matthew Carpenter (<http://www.flbc.org>) on February 17, 2015 at 11:50 am

Marie,

I can vouch for what Carey said about Redeemer Presbyterian NYC and Liquid Church. I know the head pastor of Redeemer personally and I know their ministry intimately (I worked directly with them for 7+ years in Manhattan). Redeemer is packed with 20's and 30's, the preaching is amazing and the ministry is solid.

The Lord moved me out to NJ to pastor a small baptist church and I'm actually right in the area where Liquid church does it's ministry. Really love that church, it's leadership and how their effecting the young adults out here. Liquid Church would also be a stellar fit for your 22 year old. I'll pray for both of your kids today, especially since one is in my ministry area... after all, that's what family (God's) is for.

Reply

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